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OR, Thad Burr's Marvelous Case.

A Romance of the Newburg Mystery.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF "XX, THE FATAL CLEW," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE INTERRUPTED WEDDING.

THADDEUS BURR, the detective, had been enjoying what was something rare for him, a spell of idleness. Not a very extended one, it is true, and to most people in the habit of taking from two weeks' to a month's vacation, it would have appeared nothing at all. But to his active, restless soul the week spent with his wife and children at the sea-shore seemed little short of wanton waste of good time.

"Oh, dear," he yawned, as he returned to the hotel at Asbury Park, after a stroll on the beach with the children, "this will never do in the world, mother. I am actually rusting for want of action."

JUST AS HE HAD RAISED THE BOUQUET TO HIS NOSE HE DROPPED DEAD BEFORE THE VOW WAS PRONOUNCED.

"That is always your way, Thad," rejoined his wife. "You are never willing to give yourself time for rest. You could not have a more cruel and relentless driver if you were a slave. However, if you *must* return to work, here is probably an opportunity for you," she continued, tossing him a letter, the superscription of which was in the well-known hand-writing of Inspector Byrnes.

"Ah, this is something like!" he exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, as he threw himself upon a sofa and tore the letter open.

His wife watched his countenance as he read, and soon saw it overspread with a deeply puzzled expression.

From the length of time he consumed in poring over the epistle she judged that it was either very long or very hard to understand.

After he had finished perusing the letter he sat for some time staring dreamily at the carpet, apparently lost in deep meditation.

At length a profound sigh burst from him, followed by the words, which were in the nature of a soliloquy:

"This is indeed a knotty problem."

This sentence was so obviously a quotation from the letter he had just finished reading that his wife's curiosity was aroused.

"What is it, Thad?" she asked.

The detective stared as though he had just met a specter on turning a corner.

For a moment he stared vacantly at his wife as if unable to comprehend her meaning, and she was compelled to repeat the question.

"Why, the case?" he answered slowly at last.

"What case, Thad?"

"Oh, pardon me, my dear," suddenly, apparently embarrassed. "I had forgotten that you hadn't read the letter. Shall I read it to you?"

"I will be delighted if you will," she cried, eagerly.

"All right; here goes," picking up the letter, which had fallen to the floor. "I'll skip the heading and date.

"DEAR THAD:—

"I am sorry to break in upon your much needed repose, and wouldn't if I could see my way out of my dilemma without it.

"To come to the point at once, the situation is brief—this:

"There has been a murder committed at Newburg, on the Hudson; at least, that is the supposition, although the authorities up there and the friends of the deceased are about evenly divided between subtle poisoning and heart disease, with here and there a crazy theorist who talks about hypnosis, visitations of invisible avenging spirits, and all that sort of rot; and as for the doctors, they are as much in the dark as anybody else.

"I sent Osburn up, who, after spending a day probing around among the mass of gossip, came back discouraged, and with this piece of information, which I had read in the paper, twelve hours before: There was to be a swell wedding, one of those unions of wealth and popularity on the one side, with wealth and beauty on the other, that sets society agog for months. Well, the upshot of it was, the happy, or soon-to-be-happy pair were within a few words from the minister of being made man and wife, when suddenly, and apparently in response to the divine's question as to whether any one had any objection to the pair being united, the bridegroom dropped to the floor as though he had been shot. A physician was summoned, but when he arrived the man was as dead as a herring.

"A subsequent post-mortem examination revealed to the astute physicians—nothing. There was not the slightest trace of poison either in the stomach, blood or brain, and the heart was in as normal a state as if the man had died from indigestion or brain fever.

"The deceased, although a new-comer, was universally popular, and, so far as known, had not an enemy in the world.

"So now, old fellow, you know as much about the case as I or anybody else, and if you can fathom the luxury of idleness, it rests with you to fathom the apparently impenetrable mystery. I know that if the thing is within the power of mortal, you are that mortal.

"Go to work at once, if it all and success to you. If you do not care to tackle the case, wire me—declined with thanks."

"Very truly,

"THOMAS BYRNES,

"Inspector of Police."

"Well, what are you going to do, Thad?" asked his wife, when the detective had finished the letter.

"Go, of course, my dear," he replied. "That is all there is to be done. You and the children had better stay here for a week or two, at least until I get through with the case, and it may be that I will have a chance to run down now and then to see you."

"Until you get through?" echoed his wife. "From the appearance of the case it may take you months."

"I hardly think so, my dear. It looks dark and mysterious on its surface, but may be more easily unraveled than it seems. At all events I would like to bet that I will know something about it inside of a month."

An hour later Burr had taken the train for New York.

Arriving in the metropolis, he repaired to his rooms, or "studio," as he called them, where he packed a few necessary articles in a valise, and was soon on his way to Newburg, where he arrived a few hours later.

His first move on arriving at Newburg was

to go to the house of the deceased, a palatial residence in the suburbs of the town, overlooking the Hudson and surrounded by beautiful grounds.

The detective found that, although the deceased, whose name was Morton Ainsworth, was a bachelor, he was the owner of the estate, and his sister and two nieces kept house for him.

The funeral had taken place that day and the household was in the desolate state that always follows a death in the house.

The family consisted, in addition to the sister, whose name was Parkinson, and her two daughters, Bettie and Louise, of a half-witted young man of uncertain age, with an abnormally large head and great pale, expressionless eyes that earned for him the pseudonym of "The Owl," and a decrepit old man.

Although "The Owl" was the only name by which the neighbors knew the weak-minded young man, he himself confided to the detective that his name was Flavius de Melville Montagu.

This odd specimen of humanity stood in the hallway when the detective entered and stared at him as though he had had horns.

Thad's quick eye at once discerned the vacant mind behind those expressionless eyes, and was about to pass the poor creature by without noticing him, when the imbecile touched him lightly upon the shoulder as an indication that he wanted him to stop.

When the detective turned and faced him, the fellow put his finger to his lips in token of silence, looked mysteriously about and said, in a low tone:

"He's dead, he is—he's dead now!"

Thad recognized in this the vaporings of an idiot, and yet he could but imagine that the poor fellow knew something about the murder (if such it should turn out to be) that might be valuable to him (Thad) if the poor, disjointed mind could be concentrated long enough upon any one object. Therefore he spoke to the fellow.

"Yes, I know he is dead," said Thad. "Who killed him?"

A strange, frightened expression struggled into the weak face, similar to that of a child at sight of some (to it) frightful object.

"Kill?—kill?" he muttered. "No—no—I did not kill him!"

"I know *you* did not, my dear fellow," returned Thad. "I only asked you who did kill him."

"Who did kill him?" repeated the idiot, with a puzzled expression. Then suddenly breaking forth into an idiotic laugh, he said: "I know who."

"Well, who?"

"I know, te, he, he, he!" he laughed.

"Won't you please tell me?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

The fellow looked around mysteriously again, placed his finger over his lips once more, and whispered:

"Sibyl!"

"Who?"

"Sibyl!"

"Who is Sibyl?"

"Don't you know?" asked the imbecile in astonishment.

"No, my good fellow," assured the detective, in a coaxing voice. "Who is she?"

"Why—why—" here another mysterious look about him. "I'll tell you my name."

"Well?"

"Flavius de Melville Montague," he replied, with a gusto, showing that he was proud of the name.

"That is a magnificent name," declared Thad, smiling. "Now, won't you tell me—"

"It is a splendid name!" interrupted the idiot, "and yet the boys about here don't consider it such, and call me—what do you suppose they call me?"

"I haven't the remotest idea," responded Thad, growing impatient.

"The Owl, sir—The Owl!" with a look of injured dignity.

"That is too bad. But now, Mr. Flavius de Melville Montagu, won't you please tell me who Sibyl is?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"She is—"

At this point the detective was surprised to see the fellow turn abruptly on his heel and walk away.

While he was wondering what had caused this sudden flight, Thad was brought suddenly to a realization of his position by the angry clearing of some one's throat at the top of the stairs, and looking up he beheld a feeble old man leaning upon one cane and brandishing another, but whether at him or the departed imbecile the inquisitor could not make out.

At that moment he was relieved from his embarrassing situation by the return of the servant to whom he had intrusted his card, saying that Miss Parkinson would see him.

As Thad walked into the parlor, two thoughts flashed in succession through his mind.

One was, why had he been kept standing in

the hall so long waiting for an answer? and the other was, why had Miss Parkinson agreed to see him, when he had asked for Mrs. Parkinson?

He was soon satisfied upon the latter point, however, for as soon as he entered the parlor he was joined by Miss Bettie, a pretty and vivacious brunette, who said that her mamma and her sister Louise were too much overcome with grief to see anybody.

Thad could not help remarking that grief did not appear to have much influence upon Miss Bettie, but kept the thought to himself.

She invited the detective, in a cordial and cheerful manner, to sit down, and dropping into an easy-chair herself, introduced the subject in which Thad was most deeply interested.

"I see by your card, sir, that you are a detective from New York," she remarked. "I presume you have been sent here to investigate the case of my uncle, Morton Ainsworth."

"You are correct in your conjecture, miss," replied Thad, surprised at her readiness to discuss this subject. "There appears to be a great deal of mystery about the death of your uncle. What seems to be the prevailing opinion with regard to the manner of his taking off?"

"There cannot be said to be a prevailing opinion," was the response, "for there are as many theories about it as there are leaves on the lawn. The morbidly inclined are satisfied that it was murder, and I guess I may be classed among the crowd, for I'm positive it was murder."

"What makes you think so, miss?"

"Because any kind of disease leaves its trace. It is only the subtle cunning of the human assassin that can kill and leave no track but the poor stiff clay."

"Was there any motive, to your knowledge, Miss Parkinson?"

"Not to my knowledge; but that signifies nothing. There might be a thousand motives without my knowing anything about it."

"What, in your opinion, Miss Parkinson, was the murderer's mode of procedure, supposing it to have been murder? Have you any theory upon the subject?"

"I have, sir," she replied emphatically; "and if I were a man and had a little detective's experience, I'll bet I could ferret the thing out in no time."

"I have no doubt of it, Miss Parkinson," declared Thad, smiling. "I can see penetration in your very eyes. But, you haven't told me what your theory is."

"Oh, Well, it is very simple. Some kind of an invisible poison was doubtless employed."

"When or how do you imagine it was administered?"

"That is impossible to tell. Maybe hours, maybe days before. I have been reading a book about a doctor in India, called an avator, who has discovered poisons which he can administer at any time and regulate the effect with such precision that he can have his victim die a month after he gives the poison, not only upon the day of the month and week, but upon the minute he desires."

"That is remarkable, if true, Miss Parkinson; let me ask you, had your uncle any enemies, so far as you know?"

"No, sir, not one that I know of. Still he might have had enemies for all that."

"He was pretty generally liked, was he not?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps the best illustration I can give of how well he was liked and how universally, is to tell you that at the very moment the minister asked the question whether any one had any objection to these people being united in holy wedlock, and so on, a little child who was a member of uncle's Sunday-school, stepped out and handed him a beautiful bouquet of flowers. The poor man did not live long to enjoy them, though, for just as he had raised the bouquet to his nose he dropped dead before the vow was pronounced."

"Ah!" thought Thad, "she has given me a clew without suspecting it!"

"Do you know who this child was, Miss Parkinson?" asked the detective, scarcely able to suppress his eagerness.

"Oh, yes. It was Mr. Willard's little daughter, Edith," she replied carelessly.

"Thank you, Miss Parkinson," said Thad, rising. "I won't trouble you to answer any more questions this evening."

The detective then took his leave.

CHAPTER II.

LOOKS LIKE A CLEW.

As Burr left the house he kept a sharp lookout for the Owl, but could see nothing of him.

The moon shone splendidly, and as the detective made his way down the long gravel walk that led from the porch through the beautiful grounds to the gate, he could not repress certain feelings of awe as the morning foliage caused innumerable strange, weird shapes to appear in the dancing shadows.

Once he imagined he saw the idiot's great, dull, expressionless eyes peering at him through the foliage, but upon second thoughts he decided that it was only imagination and dismissed the thought.

One thought there was that he could not ban-

ish, however, and that was what the idiot had said.

Strive as he would to think it was only the driveling of an idiot, the hope would recur to him again and again that possibly the poor creature had seen or heard something which if got out of him, would lead to a clew.

And as the clew-seeker ruminated, the name Sibyl, as it had been uttered in the idiot's strange metallic voice, kept ringing in his ear like the refrain of a song.

Who was this Sibyl who had so impressed herself upon the poor fellow's mind? What had she done? Or, after all, was it a mere fancy of the silly fellow—a name which, from its oddity had impressed itself upon his weak memory as a child will be heard repeating certain words which evidently sound musical to its ears?

The detective was perplexed.

But he comforted himself with the thought that he would probe the matter to the bottom before long.

Another thing that vexed him, he had forgotten to speak to Miss Bettie about the matter, as he had intended. The mention of the bouquet given to the gloom by the little child, and the theory that it opened up in his mind, drove everything else completely away.

So rapid and complicated were his thoughts that he did not realize where he was going until he had nearly reached the hotel at which he was stopping. Then it occurred to him that he did not want to go there just yet.

Thad consulted his watch, and found that it was eleven o'clock, too late to call upon the Willards that night; still he felt that he could not go to bed until he had made a little progress in the case, and concluded to call upon the physician who had led the autopsy of the body, whose name was Dr. Putnam.

Fortunately he found the doctor at home, wide awake and willing to talk.

After some unimportant conversation, the detective came direct to the point:

"It would be unfair and discourteous in me, doctor, to question the fact that you and your colleagues made a thorough examination of the remains; still, do you not think it would have been wise to postpone the funeral and had the advice of still other physicians? There are experts in the city, you know, who have made a specialty of poisons—have made it a point to keep pace with the recent remarkable discoveries in this line."

"I know," answered the doctor, reflectively. "Still, I do not think—I am positive—that the best expert in the world could have done more than we did. I claim nothing for myself, although I have spent a good portion of my life in studying the phenomena of poisons; but we had among us a Doctor Siebeloff, a Siberian, who has made it a life study."

"And yet this case baffles you all?"

"Yes."

"Then your theory is—"

"That the man was no more poisoned than you are," replied the doctor, firmly.

"How do you account for his death, then? You say it was neither apoplexy or congestion?"

"There I confess to being in the dark, sir. There are subtle complications in the human system which at times produce death, and leave no more trace than the electric current bearing an important message leaves upon the wire that conducts it. This, in my opinion, is one of them."

"You consider, then, that I, as an arm of mere law and justice, am wasting my time in attempting to discover that which has baffled medical experts, I suppose?"

The doctor laughed sarcastically.

"Well, no," he responded. "You detectives are employed to fill a certain post, which, in some cases, amounts to nothing more than beating the empty bushes; but it satisfies the ignorant public, and makes the deceased's friends feel more comfortable to think that something has been done, or at least attempted."

"Thank you," returned Thad, a little testily. "Now, doctor, I want to say that I am not only a detective, but I also belong to that ignorant public of which you speak, whose curiosity craves satisfaction; and, medical expert though you are, I will show you in time that your learned autopsy isn't worth *that*!" snapping his fingers. "I will prove it to you, as well as to the ignorant public, that Morton Ainsworth was murdered, and with a poison too subtle for your comprehension!"

The doctor laughed again.

"Bravo!" he cried; "I hope you may; and when you do I shall advocate your election as an honorary member of our fraternity."

The idea was so ridiculous that, combined with the doctor's good-humor, instantly dissipated the detective's temporary anger.

He laughed also, and extending his hand, said, good-naturedly:

"All right, doctor. We won't quarrel. After all, it is quack against quack, and it is only a question of who can make the most noise. I bid you good-evening."

"Good-evening!" said the doctor, in a kindly tone. "Let me know what progress you make."

"I certainly will, and may call upon you for a little assistance before I get through."

"Do; and I shall do my best for you."

It was too late when Thad left the doctor's to do any more that night, so he returned to the hotel and went to bed.

He was up early the next morning, and as soon as he could consistently do so, he called upon the Willards.

The detective found a quiet, respectable family, in moderate circumstances, consisting of Mr. Archibald Willard, his wife and three interesting children, two girls and a boy.

The youngest, Edith, a child of six, was the one who had immortalized herself by handing the bouquet to the fated bridegroom, and as a consequence was the recipient of innumerable visits from curious and morbid people from far and near, of which the little miss was extremely proud.

"So this is the little lady of whom I have heard so much, is it?" remarked Thad, when he had won her confidence and the gratitude of the mother by giving the child a new half-dollar.

"Yes," returned the mother, proudly; "and a most unfortunate circumstance it was. I fear it will leave a sad impression upon the child's whole life."

Thad could not help noticing the utter absence of sadness from the child at that moment, for she was alternately employed in pulling the cat's tail and attempting to wash the face of a very dirty wax-doll by spitting on it and polishing it with her apron—little diversions that caused the fond mother to pause in her conversation occasionally to administer a slap to the little sinner.

"I have heard that the deceased was universally loved and revered," went on Thad.

"Oh, yes, everybody adored Mr. Ainsworth," answered the lady. "He was so good and kind—always had a smile for every one. He fairly idolized children, and lavished his money upon them."

"He wasn't as good as this gentleman, mamma," put in Edith. "Mr. Ainsworth never give nothin' but pennies, and this gentleman gives half-dollars."

"Shut up, and run play!" cried the mother, angrily, following the words with a stinging slap on the child's ears. "Yes, he was loved by every one," she resumed, as soon as her voice could be heard above the child's screams.

"What was his profession or business, madam?" asked Thad.

"He was a retired minister. It seems that he made a fortune in California and came here to settle down and enjoy it."

"Ah, then, he was not a young man?"

"No, not exactly; about forty or forty-five, I should say, and very handsome, oh *very* handsome. The ladies all admired him."

"How long had he been here?"

"Only a year."

"Who is the lady to whom he was about to be married?"

"A Miss Cockerall, the belle of the town. Her people are extremely rich."

"Mr. Ainsworth was at the head of a Sunday-school, I believe?"

"Yes, sir; he took an active part in all such things; indeed, he was the life of the town."

"And Edith was a member of his school, was she?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the idea of giving the bouquet to the unfortunate man her own, or did some one suggest it to her?"

"It was partly her notion and partly mine."

"Did you purchase the flowers?"

"Her father did."

"Did he buy them directly from the florist's himself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did the flowers pass through no other hands?"

"None but his and mine until we got to the church. Of course after we got there a good many people—friends—took them to look at them."

"You are sure that nobody but friends touched them?"

"Certainly. There was nobody else there."

"You are quite positive that no stranger had gone into the church, unobserved?"

"Yes, I am," rejoined Mrs. Willard, firmly.

"But, mamma," interrupted Edith, who had forgotten her late trouble enough to return and take an interest in the conversation, "the poor woman, you know."

"Oh, well, that doesn't amount to anything," snapped the lady. "You mustn't interrupt older people when they are talking."

"Pardon me, madam," protested Thad, pricking up his ears at sight of what looked like the tail of a clew; "what was there about this poor woman?"

"Oh, it was nothing," retorted the lady, impatiently. "As we approached the church door an old stooped-over woman stood there with her hand out, begging. When Edith came along with her bouquet the old woman grabbed the child's hand and raised the flowers to her nose."

"Then, what did she do?" asked Thad, thoroughly interested.

"Nothing. Just raised the flowers and smelt of them and let the child's hand go again."

"Did she say anything?"

"Yes, she said: 'God bless you, little girl! What beautiful flowers!'"

"Was that all?"

"Yes, I think so."

"No, mamma," again intruded Edith. "Don't you know? She said: 'They're for the good man that's to be married, I s'pose,' an' I said: 'Yes'm.'"

"Did you see her about after that?" asked the detective.

"No, sir," replied the lady.

"She went right away," assured Edith, "as fast as ever she could go, an' she had a cane to walk with."

"What was the idea of handing the flowers to Mr. Ainsworth at the particular time at which they were given?" asked Thad.

"That was a mistake," explained Mrs. Willard. "They were to be given at the conclusion of the ceremony, when everybody was congratulating the couple."

"'Twasn't my fault, ma," whispered the child.

"No, it wasn't the child's fault," said the mother. "It seems that some officious person whispered to her and told her to go at the wrong moment."

"Do you know who this person was?" asked the detective.

"I have no idea, sir."

"Did not Edith see the person?"

"No; she was too much excited to see anybody just then."

"Do you know what became of the bouquet, Mrs. Willard?"

"I do not; although I have no doubt the minister or some of the deacons could tell you."

"Very well, thank you, Mrs. Willard, for the information you have given me, and I won't trouble you any longer."

After securing the addresses of the minister and some of the deacons, Thad took his leave.

The next place he went was to the minister's house.

The minister was a simple-hearted old man, with a kind face and generous double-chin. He invited the detective in very cordially, but was horrified when he found what Thad's mission was.

"Why, my dear sir," he protested, "the poor man's death was the result of a visitation of Divine Providence, and there is no use of meddling with it."

"That may be all right, Mr. Goodman," replied Thad; "but the law of the land demands that when a man dies in a mysterious manner the facts connected with it must be ferreted out, if possible, and if the death was the result of violence, the guilty party brought to justice."

"Just so," assented the old clergyman; "but I did not imagine that any one thought Mr. Ainsworth had been murdered; I can think of no motive, can you?"

"Not yet, but I may discover one by and by. Now, Mr. Goodman, have you any idea what became of the bouquet of flowers that was given to the deceased a moment before he fell dead?"

"I have not. Among the mass of flowers that covered the altar it would be difficult to distinguish one bouquet. However, I can tell you this much: the bouquet was composed of Jacqueminot roses, and Deacon Raddish removed the flowers after the ceremony. What he did with them he can tell you better than I can."

"One more point nearer," thought Thad, as he left the minister's house. "Now, if I can only find that bouquet I will be fairly on the road to success."

But, when Deacon Raddish was questioned he furnished the discouraging information that the flowers had all been destroyed!

CHAPTER III.

THE FATAL BOUQUET.

DEACON RADDISH was a rough-and-ready man with sandy hair and a red nose.

He could not imagine what anybody wanted with those flowers, now, as they were all wilted anyhow, even if they had not been destroyed.

"Are you sure they were *all* destroyed?" inquired Thad.

"Yes, I'm quite sure," the deacon replied. "You see, ordinarily we leave the flowers in the church till they're wilted; but on this occasion, there was so much confusion that some of them on the altar was trampled to pieces; so we just tuck them all out and flung 'em at the back of the church."

"What is generally done with the flowers after they are thrown out?" asked Thad.

"Why, a man comes with a wagon and hauls 'em away."

"Does no one ever gather them up—that is in case any of them should not be wilted?"

"Sometimes."

"I presume, though, it would be impossible to tell who, if anybody, had taken them?"

"Yes. They are poor people, generally children, and possibly not the same ones twice."

Thad was a little more discouraged when he

left the deacon than he had ever been since he had commenced his career as a detective.

There seemed no vestige of a clew anywhere.

If this was murder, the more than ordinary cunning of the perpetrators appeared to be backed up by the most extraordinary chain of lucky circumstances he had ever known.

He scarcely knew where to turn next, and in his dilemma wandered aimlessly about the streets, neither knowing or caring where he went.

At length, without knowing how he got there, he found himself in front of a church.

It was a small, old-fashioned church, with vines climbing over the walls, and a cemetery flanked it on three sides.

As he stood gazing absently in among the grave-stones he was attracted by the sight of a fresh-made grave at the rear of the lot, and something impelled him to open the iron gate and enter the yard.

Once inside, he made his way straight toward the new grave.

A broad slab stood at the head of another grave and concealed the greater part of the new one from the view of any one approaching from the front of the yard.

The detective sauntered leisurely along the path, and was within a hundred feet of the new grave, when, to his surprise, some one rose from behind the slab.

It was a woman poorly clad, and apparently bent with age.

Her back was toward the detective when she first rose, but he could see that she walked with a gnarled, knotty stick.

The detective instinctively paused at the sight of the woman.

She stood for an instant, apparently gazing at something in another direction.

Then suddenly she turned and glanced nervously toward the front of the yard.

In doing so she caught sight of the detective, and to his surprise turned and ran toward the rear of the yard as nimbly as a girl of sixteen, instead of the decrepit creature she appeared to be.

Thad was so surprised at the action that he stood in a dazed sort of way gazing after her.

Then all of a sudden it occurred to him that this was the old woman of whom the child had spoken as coming up to her and scenting her bouquet.

No sooner did the thought flash through his brain than he forgot everything else, even of being surprised, and bounded after her with the speed of a greyhound.

A few bounds brought him to where he had first observed her, and she was by this time nearing the rear fence, and running like a deer.

On sped the detective, gaining on her with every bound.

As she ran her hair came unfastened and fell in luxurious masses nearly to her heels, and even amid the excitement of the chase, Thad could not fail to remark that the hair was a rich auburn in color and had not a gray hair among it.

As soon as the woman reached the rear fence she turned and ran along it for some distance, and as Thad was momentarily gaining upon her, he hoped to overtake her soon, as she would shortly reach the side fence and be compelled to turn abruptly to the right.

On he dashed, and was only a few steps behind her, when she suddenly stopped, and pushing open a gate, darted through, and slammed the gate in his face just as he arrived on the spot.

He was about to grasp the bars with a view to wrenching the gate open, when she coolly turned the key, which was on the outside of the lock, and then hastily withdrawing it, darted off at full speed.

The fence and gate, which were of iron, were ten feet high, and Thad at once saw the folly of attempting to scale them.

His only hope of following her was to go out the front way and go clear round the lot. But that would entail a great deal of delay, and the woman would escape him.

So he had the mortification of having to stand helplessly there and see her disappear around a corner.

However, he was not entirely disheartened. The circumstance, he believed, had furnished him with a clew.

It had not occurred to him at first that the new grave was possibly that of the murdered man. He had not even thought whether this was the church in which the tragedy occurred or not. But now he felt positive of both.

Not only that, but he was convinced that this woman was in some way connected with the murder (if such it should prove,) else why had she fled at his approach?

She was evidently guilty of some crime, and as her description tallied with that of the old woman who had accosted Edith (at least as she doubtless appeared to the child), there was a connecting chain of circumstantial evidence between her and the fatal bouquet.

The detective made his way toward the church again, and as he neared it from the rear his attention was attracted by a mass of withered leaves lying on the ground.

He went up to them and began poking among them with his cane.

As he saw nothing of interest among the withered mass, he soon tired of this and was about to move away, when he noticed a small piece of soiled ribbon.

He stooped to pick it up, when he found that there was a small card attached to it.

The card was so smeared with dirt that he could see nothing on it at first, but, after carefully scraping away the mud, he saw that there was writing on it.

It took a good deal of time and patience, however, to make anything out of it.

But, after a long and patient examination, cautiously cleaning this line and that so as to remove the dirt without effacing the writing, he finally deciphered the inscription:

"EDITH WILLARD,

TO HER FRIEND,

"MORTON AINSWORTH."

The detective's heart bounded wildly at the discovery.

This was evidently the ribbon which had bound the bouquet.

Thad felt that he had made a discovery, but upon maturer reflection the circumstance did not afford him much gratification, for the fact of the ribbon being there was pretty good evidence that the bouquet had been destroyed.

However, he did not cease to hope that something would come out of it, and with these reflections, started to leave the place.

Before he had taken a step, however, his attention was attracted by a ragged and dirty little girl standing only a few feet away, with her finger in her mouth, bashfully watching his movements.

How long she had been there it was impossible to tell, and few men would have taken the trouble to ascertain. But Thad was thoroughly alive to his work now, and everything, from a dirty child to a rustling leaf promised a clew for him.

The moment he looked at the child she turned and was about to go away, but an offer of the all-powerful penny caused her to come back, take the money and raise her eyes timidly to the detective's face.

"Whose little girl are you?" he asked, in a gentle voice.

"Mamma's," was the reply.

Then, after a little baby talk on general topics, she grew bold and chatted quite freely.

"You can't find no flowers dere now," she said, "'cause the chillen took 'em all."

"What children?" asked Thad.

"All de chillen; me and Cilly and Katie and all of 'em."

"Who got the bunch of roses?"

The child was thoughtful a moment, and then she said:

"De big red ones?"

"Yes, sissy."

"W'y, w'y—Cilly dot dem."

"Who is Cilly?"

"W'y, w'y—jis' Cilly."

"Where does she live?"

"Over dere," replied the child pointing.

"Will you take me to the house, little girl, if I buy you a whole lot of candy?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"All right, come on," said the detective, taking the child's hand.

As soon as they came to a confectioner's, Thad went in and bought a lot of candy and gave it to her.

This loosened her tongue more than ever, and she chatted like a little magpie all the way along; but she was too young to comprehend anything of the murder, and therefore could give no information of value.

At length they came to a row of wooden houses in the poorest part of the town, and the child pointed to a house a little shabbier than the rest, with the remark:

"Cilly live dere."

"Won't you come with me and call Cilly out for me?" asked Thad, coaxingly.

"No, ma'am; Cilly steal my candy."

"No she won't; I won't let her. Besides I'll buy you some more if you will do as I ask you," coaxed the detective.

She was thoughtful a moment again, and said:

"You buy me heaps candy?"

"Yes."

She said no more, but toddled across the road toward the house.

Having arrived there she called lustily for Cilly.

The person answering to that name did not respond, but instead a greasy, weak-eyed woman with a dirty baby in her arms, came to the door and told the child to clear out as Cilly wasn't there.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said Thad politely, "but is Cilly a daughter of yours?"

"Yes, she is," snapped the woman savagely, at the same time eying the detective suspiciously.

"What do yer want with her?"

"Nothing, with her particularly, madam," returned Thad gently. "I merely want to ask

whether she brought home a bouquet of Jack roses one day this week, which she had picked up in the churchyard?"

"She brought home some flowers," growled the woman ill-naturedly; "but they was all wilted and wasn't no good to nobody."

"I know that, madam," pleaded Thad. "Nobody cares a straw for the roses; only I was curious to know whether she had kept them from dropping to pieces all this time. Do you know ma'am, whether she still has them or not?"

The woman growled something about people making a heap o' fuss over a few old withered roses, but finally said that she would see.

She went away, and after a little while came back with a broken mug in which there were a lot of bare stems and one solitary bud, withered and black, but still a bud.

The detective's heart almost leaped into his mouth at the sight. He could not have been more overjoyed if it had been a diamond of the same dimensions, and all his own.

"Madam," he said, scarcely able to suppress his eagerness, "you may think it strange, but I would like to buy that bouquet, mug, water and all. How much will you take for it?"

The woman looked at him in astonishment.

She evidently believed him to be a raving maniac.

"What d'ye want with them old things?" she asked at length.

"Never mind; I want them, and am willing to pay for them."

She smiled as though she pitied him.

"How much d'ye want to give?" she asked.

"I'll give you a dollar," replied Thad, holding up the money.

"Well, you air crazy," she cried; "but if you want 'em so bad yer kin hev 'em fer ten cents."

"Very well," said Thad, taking the broken mug and handing her the dollar; "you can give me the change when I come back."

With that he walked away.

When he got across the road he glanced back and saw the woman ringing the coin upon the doorstep to see whether it was good or not.

He also saw the dirty little girl tagging after him, which reminded him that he had promised her an additional supply of candy.

He called her over, and soon found a candy store, where her wants were supplied.

A few minutes later Thad took the train for New York, and arrived in the city two hours afterward. He made his way without delay to the laboratory of an analytical chemist of his acquaintance named Andry Dodorov, a Russian, carrying with him the precious mug and bouquet.

"Vell, what have we now, Mistaire Burr?" said the little chemist.

"I want you to see, Dodorov," said Thad, putting down the broken mug of withered flowers in front of him, "if you can find any poison in that."

The Russian shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Some more of your ingenious poisoning cases, ah, Mistaire Burr?" he said.

"I think so," rejoined Thad.

"It eez wonderful ze amount of ingenuity zat eez expended to get people out of ze world," said the little chemist, as he began his investigation; "eef one-half ze talent was expended upon saving life and making people comfortable, zis would be a happy world, but vare thickly populated, my friend."

Dodorov first lifted the withered stems and the solitary bud carefully out of the water and placed them in a glass dish. He then submitted the water to a careful analysis, at the end of which he shook his head.

"Nossing in zare, Mistaire Burr," he said, "but ze natural vegetable fluid which has exuded from ze stems. Let us see what zare eez in ze stems."

These he submitted to a still more rigid examination, and again shook his head.

"Nossing zare," he said. "Now for ze bud."

This analysis was extremely tedious. Each separate leaf was taken apart with a delicate pair of tweezers and, first placed under a powerful microscope and then immersed in a colorless fluid which the chemist had in a sort of glass tank, after which the liquid itself was placed under the microscope.

Thad watched the little chemist's face intently during the operation.

For a long time there was nothing in the expression to inspire hope. It was the anxious expression of the searcher who had little hope of success. This continued for hours—weeks, it seemed to Thad, in his anxiety, and he was about on the verge of despair, when suddenly he saw a faint light come into the Russian's face. He had evidently found something, for, still keeping the rose-leaf under the microscope, he began to scrape it with a blade so delicate that it might have been a cambric needle flattened. As he scraped he seemed to remove something, which he placed upon a small ebony tablet. After this operation had continued for some time, the chemist placed the tablet under the microscope. The light in his face grew a trifle, but still there was a mixture of anxiety with that of hope. Finally he scraped the substance

from the tablet into the liquid, and placed it under the microscope.

Presto! his face was ablaze with light!

"I have eet!" he exclaimed.

"What?" cried Thad, breathlessly.

"Ze most wonderful, ze most subtle poison zat has ever come under my observation. Eet eez a combination of several mineral and vegetable products, and eez only effective from inhalation. And ze strangest part of eet eez zat eet can only be used in connection wiz somesing wiz a strong perfume, like flowers. Ze perfume has ze effect of vaporizing ze poison, which rises and does eets deadly work, leaving ze powder as harmless as chalk."

CHAPTER IV.

SOME GOOD POINTS.

AFTER securing a written statement from Prof. Dodorov, the detective returned to Newburg.

It was late in the evening when he got back, nevertheless he could not refrain from carrying out a project he had in his mind, which was to have another interview with Miss Bettie Parkinson, and, if possible, gain a few points of information which were necessary for the furtherance of his case.

The grand old mansion looked as solemn and gloomy as ever when he approached it.

The moon was shining brightly, bringing out the beautiful landscape in strong relief, and there was just enough breeze to make the foliage shimmer in a ghastly manner, as he made his way toward the house along the gravel walk.

As he cast his eyes about him when half-way from the gate to the porch, he was suddenly startled at the sight of what appeared to be a pair of large eyes, peering at him through the foliage, but a second's reflection sufficed to reassure him, and convince him that it was nothing but imagination, or at most an optical illusion, and he was on the point of dismissing the idea as such, when a strange, metallic voice, in a scarcely audible tone, said:

"Say, mister!"

Thad stopped and looked in the direction.

Now he not only saw the eyes, but he could also discern the outlines of a figure, but still partially concealed behind the shrubbery.

The detective hesitated.

He did not care about approaching what might be an enemy in ambush, and yet his curiosity was aroused to such a pitch that he could not proceed without knowing what or who it was.

While he hesitated the voice repeated the words:

"Say, mister!"

"Well?" said Thad, "what do you want?"

"Come closer," said the voice. "I want to speak to you; but I mustn't be seen."

The voice for the most part was strange to the detective's ear, and yet there were notes of resemblance here and there to that of the idiot he had met in the hall. But, upon the whole, there was something much more manly about this voice.

After a moment's reflection the detective retraced his steps along the path until he was opposite the clump of shrubbery behind which the speaker was concealed, and, in order to bring himself still nearer, took a few steps out of the path, upon the grass.

"Well?" he repeated, when he had reached this spot.

"You—you are the man that came here last night—and talked to Miss Bettie, are you not?"

"I am," replied Thad.

"You are a detective, aren't you?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"No matter; I know you are, and you are working on the case of the supposed murder of Mr. Ainsworth."

"Well, suppose I am, then what?" said the detective, bluntly.

"Only this, that I can give you some valuable information if I dared, but I don't. However, I can tell you where, and how, you can find it for yourself."

"Very well, tell me," said Thad, indifferently, for he half-suspected that he was talking to the idiot, in which case whatever he said would amount to nothing anyway.

"First promise that you won't reveal who told you."

"How can I reveal what I do not know?" demanded Thad.

A low chuckle followed this.

"So much the better, if you don't know," said the voice. "But are you real sure you do not know who I am?"

"I was never surer in my life," said Thad; "but hurry up, if you are going to tell me anything; it is getting late, and I have others to see yet to-night."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the voice in a low, metallic tone that resembled the sound produced by striking a cracked bell. "You're going to see Miss Bettie again, eh? Well, much good will it do you."

"Why, can she tell me nothing?" asked Thad, impatiently.

"Oh, yes, she'll tell you a great deal, just the same as everybody else will; but she knows no more about the case than you do."

"Do you know anything about it?" demanded Thad, still more impatiently.

"I know all about it."

"And won't tell?"

"I dare not."

"Suppose that I compel you?"

"You cannot. Nobody can compel me to talk unless I want to, and nobody will believe me if I do."

Thad was convinced now that he was talking to the idiot; and was quite as fully convinced that the fellow's imbecility was all assumed for a purpose. What that purpose was he could not imagine, but he resolved to keep his suspicion to himself, and use the information to the best advantage.

"Very well, then," said he, "tell me what you dare to, and if it leads to anything, you shall be amply rewarded."

"I want no reward," returned the other, in an injured tone; "all I want is to see justice done."

"In that case why not make a clean breast of it all?"

"I tell you I dare not."

"But you will be protected."

"Not from the danger that I would incur by revealing all I know. There is no power on earth that can protect me from that."

"Very well, then, tell me, as I said before, what you dare to tell."

"Well," said the voice, "there is not much to tell, but a good deal to do. There are two people to be found."

"Who are they?"

"One is Amos Thurlow, and the other is Moses Emstein, a Jew."

"Where are they to be found?"

"That is for you to find out. I cannot tell you."

"Well, what will I learn when I find these parties?"

"That I cannot tell you either, except that you will learn all you want to know. I'll tell you one thing, though, and that is that the Jew has some papers that will be valuable to you if you can get them; and another thing I can tell you is, that when you find the Jew he can, and I have no doubt will, tell you where Amos Thurlow can be found."

"And you can give me no hint of where this Jew can be found?"

"None—except that he will be found in New York city somewhere."

"All right," said Thad, "is this all that you can tell me?"

"Yes."

"Very well; good-night," said Thad.

"Good-night. Don't say anything inside about what you have heard."

"Certainly not," replied Thad.

A moment later the detective rung the bell at the house and was ushered into the hall.

While the servant was taking up his card Thad was surprised to see the idiot come out of a side room, stare blankly at him for an instant and go up-stairs.

The detective was puzzled.

Up to that moment he had been perfectly satisfied that it was the idiot to whom he had been talking in the yard; but now that seemed impossible.

For if it had been he, how could he have got in so quickly? And how could he have got into that room, anyway without passing through the hall?

Again, he thought, if it was not he, who could it have been?

But while these thoughts were flitting through his head, and were as yet unanswered, the servant returned with the information that Miss Bettie Parkinson would see him.

The young lady was as bright and chipper as ever, and received the detective as cordially as though she had known him all her life, instead of only twenty-four hours.

Having seated him and sunk into an easy-chair herself, she said:

"Well, Mr. Burr, what progress have you made? Or is that one of the secrets which the profession guard as they do their honor, virtue, diamonds and other valuables?"

"Yes, miss, we usually keep our affairs tolerably quiet and this is one of them," replied Thad, politely. "I don't mind telling you, however, that thus far my investigations have yielded very little of value, and therefore I have come back to you."

"What more do you expect of me?" she said, laughing. "You got all I knew last night, unless you think I have picked up a little knowledge in the past twenty-four hours, which is hardly a fair supposition, seeing that I am a woman."

"Possibly," said Thad, also laughing; "but there are a few things which I neglected to ask you, Miss Parkinson, at our last interview, and which I feel confident you will be able to answer, at least in part."

"You really think, then, that I know more than you pumped out of me on that occasion?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

"Well, in the first place, if I am not intruding upon a family secret, who is the simple-minded fellow I see about here?"

The girl changed color.

"Has he been saying anything?" she asked quickly.

"No. I just had a curiosity to know, that is all."

She looked at him steadily for a moment, as if she would fain read the meaning of his words in his face.

"That is strange," she said at last. "I can hardly imagine a man of your apparent earnestness of purpose having a curiosity to know anything for the simple sake of knowing it."

"Have you any objection, then, to giving the information, miss?"

"Certainly not. His name is Montagu, though some one has nicknamed him, and everybody calls him The Owl, on account of his large eyes. He is a poor, half-witted fellow whom my uncle took pity on and adopted. I think he started to study medicine some years ago, with a doctor named Thurlow, or some such name, and became deranged from overstudy."

"Who is, or was, this Thurlow? Did you know him?"

"No, sir; I only know of him from hearing my uncle speak of him. He lived in Cleveland, Ohio, I believe, and was in good practice and prosperous there. One night, his father, who had been traveling for several years, returned home, unexpectedly, and was found dead in Thurlow's office the next morning."

"What was done with Thurlow?"

"Nothing. He proved, it seems, he was attending a patient at the other end of the town and was not at his office all evening. He was acquitted, but everybody believed that he was guilty, even his wife, for she left him and run off with another man. Thurlow had to leave Cleveland, and has been wandering about ever since."

"You do not know where he is now, I presume?"

"No, sir."

"How long after this occurrence was it that your uncle adopted Montagu?"

"Only a short time, I think. My uncle had left Cleveland, also, and gone to California, where he had only been a few months when he ran across this poor fellow, wandering about the streets, and recognizing him, took him home with him and has kept him ever since."

"How long ago was this?"

"Oh, seventeen years, I guess. I know that I was only a baby at the time."

"You lived in Cleveland, then?"

"Yes, sir, I lived there all my life until about a year ago, when my uncle returned from California and persuaded my mother to come here and take charge of his establishment."

"Your uncle was never married, was he?"

"No, sir."

The detective was silent for a moment, during which a thousand theories and fag-ends of clues ran through his head.

"Miss Parkinson," he said at last, "you will consider me the greatest bore and the most inquisitive person on earth, but I want to ask you one more question."

"What is that?"

"Did you ever hear of any one by the name of Sibyl?"

"Sibyl?" she echoed, reflectively. "Oh, yes," she said, after a moment's reflection. "Sibyl Verne."

"Who is she?"

"I'll never tell you, except that I've heard her spoken of as an eccentric person who used to wander about the streets of Cleveland. Sometimes she would disappear for months and then suddenly and mysteriously turn up again. She was arrested several times for obtaining money under false pretenses and confidence games, as they call it, but could never prove anything against her. She was thought to be crazy."

"Has she ever been seen here?"

"Not to my knowledge. By the way, how did you come to hear of her?"

"Pardon me, Miss Parkinson," said Thad, apologetically, "but you are asking too much."

"I see," she laughed, "you are a capital questioner but a poor answerer."

"That is true, miss; but it is necessary in my business."

"I presume it is," she laughed, "and I forgive you. Any more questions?"

"Just one."

"And that is?"

"How was Thurlow's father murdered, that is, supposing that he was murdered at all—I mean, what were the means employed?"

The girl bent her head and thought a moment.

"Oh, yes, I remember, now. Why, it was never known how he came by his death."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, there was some mystery about the case. There were no marks of violence and no traces of poison, and yet the doctors could find no indications of heart disease or anything of that kind."

"A very similar case to the taking off of your uncle."

"Very. I never thought of it before."

After a little more general conversation the detective took his leave, well satisfied with the result of his interview.

CHAPTER V.
HUNTING FOR NOSES.

THAD was almost in an ecstasy of delight when he left the Parkinson mansion.

It seemed as though everything was coming his way.

What, a few days before, appeared to be an inexplicable mystery, now seemed to be unraveling, bit by bit, like a tangled skein when you get hold of the right end of the thread.

And yet there are times in the career of a detective when a plot develops too rapidly, or appears to, which indicates too frequently that it is not developing at all; that appearances are deceptive.

This, Thad was afraid, was the case in the present instance, after a little thought.

The coincidence of the two men dying in precisely the same manner, although seventeen years apart, seemed to mean something, especially when the same man's name was identified with both cases.

But as likely as not Thurlow was no longer in existence. The idiot, probably still retaining the memory of the other murder, and having it associated with the name of Thurlow, caused him to think that he had committed the present crime also.

But, after all, the fellow in the yard might not have been the idiot.

And supposing it was he, how should he have known anything about the murder?

Still more mysterious was it that if he knew, as he claimed he did, why did he not dare divulge the secret?

Who was to harm or menace him?

For if the exposition brought the guilty parties to justice they would certainly be beyond harm in him or any one else.

But on the other hand, of course the poor simple-minded fellow was not supposed to understand this.

Finally, after thinking the matter all over the detective arrived at the conclusion that the best thing to be done was to make a search for the Jew.

If he failed to find him, all well and good; while if he should run him down he might be able to glean something from the Hebrew.

For this purpose the detective again boarded the cars for New York, where he arrived long after midnight.

He immediately repaired to his "studio" on West Thirteenth street.

This place, as those who have followed Thad Burr's career, are aware, was the detective's headquarters, where he kept his various costumes, disguises and make-ups.

Here was material for making one's self up to resemble almost any character under the sun.

And Thad not only possessed the art of applying them, but could act the character and assume the dialect and tone of voice necessary, to perfection.

Having arrived at the studio, therefore, he at once proceeded to make himself up to resemble a well-dressed and well-to-do Jew, of the lower order, one of those hook-nose fellows we see in Baxter street, who seem to get a little greasier every time they wash, and it was morning when he got through.

Of course his dress was of the loudest pattern and he sported enough cheap jewelry on his person to set a hawker up in business.

Rigged out in this style, he made his way early the next morning, to Baxter street, where he was at once the envy of all the "pullers-in" and the darling of all the Rebeccas.

It was soon rumored all along the street that Isaac Silverstein, with a barrel of money, had just arrived, and was looking for his cousin, Moses Erstein, with a view to sharing his fortune with him.

Thad did not inquire directly for his cousin, but commencing at the proper place, he made himself and his business known, and thence proceeded from one place to another, allowing the news of his arrival and immense wealth to travel in advance of him, which it did.

And so he went, shaking hands with pawnbrokers, second-hand clothing men, and so on, but nobody appeared to know any thing about Moses Erstein.

Finally, when he had gone through nearly the whole street from one end to the other, he came to the store of an old chap named Herman Cohn, a little dried-up old fellow with a bald head, and whiskers enough to make himself a bed, and his store was scarcely more than four feet wide and packed to suffocation with loud-smelling second-hand clothing.

He greeted Thad cordially, and after some general conversation touching business, the old man took the detective to the rear of the store, where a smoky kerosene lamp only made the gloom more noticeable, and, taking him by the lapel in a confidential way, said:

"You was looking for your cousin, I understand, mine frient."

"So I vas," replied Thad; "and so hel-up me cracious, I dink I not vill findt him, already."

"His name vas Moses Erustein, vas it?"

"Yes, mine dear frient," said Thad, wiping his eyes upon a glaring red silk handkerchief.

"V'at he vas looked like?" asked the old Jew.

Here he had Thad in a tight place, for he had never seen Moses or heard a description of him; still he knew it wouldn't do to break down now, so he said:

"So hel-up me Moses, mine frient; I don't could told you dot. You see it vas many years since dot poy runned away from Geesen, und I don't vas seen him any more."

"Vell, I dink I can told you vere you fint dot feller, but you better vas let him alone."

"Oh, mine tear frient, how can you say dot?" wailed Thad.

"He vas a pat man, dot Moses," said the old man, gloomily, shaking his head and wagging his big whiskers.

"Oh, you don't toldt me dot?"

"Yaes, dot ish so. He vas a t'ief und a schvindler und a cut-t'roat."

"Oh, mine frient, vas you vant me to go crazy, dot you toldt me all dose dings about mine Cousin Moses, already?"

"I vas sorry, mine frient, to do it, but v'ot you going to do? You don't would have me told you a lie, und den v'en he schwindles you out of all your monish, you come pack und say, Herman, v'y you don't vas told me dot peforehant, already?"

"Vell, dot vas so; but it vas hart to hear such dings about your own tear cousin."

"I know dot," said the old man; "but Moses vas so perry pat man, it vas petter you don't go near him."

"Don't you dink I might reform him, mine frient?" asked Thad.

The old man shook his head gloomily.

"You know, mine frient," said he, "it ish pat enough v'en one of our tribe schwindles der Shentiles; but v'en a Jew schwindles von of his own tribe he vas peyond redemption."

"Oh, mine cracious! did mine Cousin Moses do dot?"

"Yaes. I'll dolt you how dot vas: You see, my Brot'er Solomon he vas in der chewelry peesness, und Moses came to him mit a tiamond pin worth von t'ousand dollars, und vanted to pawn it for ten dollars. Mine brot'er t'ought it vas funny dot a man would pawn a t'ousand-dollar pin for ten dollars, but he say not'ing, and give him der ten dollars. Two days afterward Moses comes pack und says, 'I takes my paste tiamond now,' und put down der ten dollars, mit der interest."

"Mine brot'er he says, 'Dot vas a purty goot paste you got dere; v'et you dake for him?'"

"Oh, couldn't sold dot pin," said Moses, "mine fat'er gif me dot on his death-ped; how much you gif?"

"Vell," says mine brot'er, 'der pin vasn't worth more as two hundred dollars, but, as your fat'er gif it to you, t'ree hundred.'"

"Oh, Abraham, und Jacob und Isaac!" cried Moses, "mine fat'er's ghost would haunt me if I sold dot pin for less as eight hundred dollars."

"Vell, mine brot'er stuck to him, und finally got der pin for six hundred dollars."

"Und you say mine Cousin Moses schwindled your brot'er," said Thad, pretending great indignation, "v'en he sold a t'ousand dollar pin for six hundred dollars?"

"Oh, mine frient, you don't vas heart der whole story," said the old Jew, raising his hands deprecatingly. "Der first tiamond vas worth a t'ousand dollars, it vas a real tiamond; but der second von vas paste, und not vorth fifty cents. Dot Moses exchanged the pins v'ile dey vas making der pargain."

"Oh my cracious!" cried Thad, in horror. "You told me v're I finds dot cousin Moses, und I schwear to Abraham, I kick dot feller full mit holes!"

"Vell, if you bromise dot you vill do dot, I tells you v're you finds him."

"I schwear it!" cried Thad, vehemently.

"You don't vill find him among our people any more; you vill find him, or somepody dot cau told you v're he is, at Number — Bowery; der place vas a bunco den, und Moses vas a capper for dot place."

"Oh, dot feller vas preak mine heart," said Thad, as he took his leave and made his way out of the vile-smelling place.

He went at once to the number on the Bowery indicated by the old Jew.

The "bunco ranch" was up two flights of stairs, over a low saloon, and was deserted and locked up when Thad went there, but while he was standing in the hall considering what would be the best step to take first, a slick, well-dressed individual came slowly up the stairs, and put a key into the door before he noticed Thad's presence.

After eying the detective from head to foot, he said:

"Well, Isaacs, what's gnawin' ye?"

"Mine name vasn't Isaacs, mine frient," said Thad, indignantly; "und nothin' vasn't gnawin' me!"

"Well, whatever yer blamed Sheenv name is, w'at d'ye want 'round hyar? That's w'at I want ter know. See?"

"Vell, you can ferry soon fint owit v'at I vants, und keep yer clothes on, too. I vants ter fint a cousin of mine named Moses Erstein. I vas got some monish for him."

"You don't say so," said the other, with a swagger. "How much dust ye got, Sheen?"

"Two hundred t'ousand dollars."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed the tough, "you don't say so!"

"Dot's v'at I got, mine frient."

"Say, ye ain't got it in yer clothes, have ye?"

"No; I vas a leetle too schmart ter garry dot mooch monish in mine clothes, und don't you forget it."

"Waal, I s'pose ye'll pay it over to Mose in de dead cold, won't ye?"

"Yaes, v'en I see him; v're is he?"

"Oh, he'll be 'round," said the tough, pushing the door open. "Come in and lay for him. He ain't the chap to stay away long when dere's de stuff waitin' fer 'im; he knows de valley of it too well fer dat."

Thad entered the room, and found that it was fitted up like an office, with a desk inclosed by a railing and all complete.

He knew that this was all a sham to catch the unwary, but he pretended to be very curious to know what kind of business they transacted there.

The tough explained that it was a railroad broker's office, and then proposed that to kill the time while Thad was waiting for Moses, they play a game of cards.

Thad claimed that he did not know how to play, besides it was against his religion, and the fellow finally gave him up in disgust.

After a little while the fellow renewed his attack on him.

"I say, Sheen," he said, "w'at's de matter wid fetchin' de dust up hyar? Moses 'll be hyar by de time you git back."

"V'at you takes me for, a greenhorn, or a hayseed? I vas responsible for dot monish, mine frient, und I don't propose to take some risks mit it. V'en dot feller comes, he coes mit me und receives dot monish in bresence of witness, und gives me a receipt."

"W'at's de matter wid yer? Don't you s'pose we kin have witnesses here? De best in New York."

"Best t'ieves und cut-t'roats, maybe," said Thad.

"Looke hyar, Sheeny, who you callin' thieves an' cut-t'roats, say?" roared the tough, jumping up and brandishing his fists at the detective.

"Who? You, for instance," said Thad, coolly, and forgetting his accent.

"Say, I don't 'lows no Sheeny or anybody else to talk to me dat way," said the other, swaggering up to Thad in a threatening attitude. "I generally kills a man ever day or two, see?"

"Is that so?" said Thad, slapping him in the face.

That made the tough furious, and he made a bloodthirsty rush at Thad, swearing that he'd have his life.

Thad stood perfectly calm and collected till the fellow got within easy arm's-length, then straightened out his right arm.

There was a dull sound, like that of a mule kicking an empty barrel, and the fellow went down in a heap.

He didn't rise for several minutes, and when he did, he was the meekest man on the Bowery.

A few minutes later Moses Erstein came in. He was a mean-looking scoundrel, with the word thief written in his face.

He eyed Thad suspiciously when he came in, and sidling up to his partner asked:

"Who's der party, Shake?"

"I dunno, Mose. Claims to be er cousin o' yourn, see?" growled Jake, still nursing his jaw. "Got lots o' dust, he says."

"And you ain't got none of it, Shakey? V'at kind of a plope vas you, anyway?"

"Say, Mose," growled Jake, "you jes' work dat bloke fer all it's worth, see? I ain't got no use for it; it's too many fer me."

Moses then sauntered up to Thad, who pretended to be very much interested in a very old copy of a sporting paper which he had picked up on the table.

When he was within a few feet of the detective, Moses stopped and stared at him for an instant. At that moment Thad lowered his paper, glanced up at the Jew, and the next instant sprang to his feet and embraced him in the regular Jewish fashion.

"Oh, mine cracious—mine Cousin Moses!" he cried. "I vas dink already dat I don't vas never seen you any more py dis world oudt."

The Jew was considerably surprised at his conduct, and seemed undecided whether to repulse him or receive it as a good joke, but finally decided in favor of the latter, especially as Jake had said he had plenty of money.

"You say you vas mine cousin?" said Moses.

"I don't seem to rememper you."

"Oh, mine cracious—mine tear Cousin Moses," cried Thad, "how gan you say dat you don't vas regollect your tear relation, v'en I cooms all der vay from Geesen ter pring der monish v'at our uncle vas left for us?"

"Monish?" cried Moses, with a hungry look. "You vas got monish for me?"

"Yaes, my tear."

"How mooch?" with greedy eyes.

"Two hundred t'ousand dollars."

"Mine cracious—mine cousin!" cried Moses.

"Dat vas a cyclone for me. V're ish dat monish, my tear?"

"Py my room on Dirteen street; offer you cooms mit me, ve git it right away."

After a little consultation with his partner the Jew decided to accompany the detective, but Jake was to go along also.

"V'at? Dat sunfish co mit us?" cried Thad. "Not if mine name was Ikey Silverstein!"

The fellow slunk away, and Moses and the detective went off alone.

CHAPTER VI.

MOSES'S ESCAPE.

MOSES did not suspect that he was being led into a trap, and chattered along cheerfully, apparently under the impression that he had struck an "innocent," as the boys say.

He could not for the life of him imagine how anybody intrusted with two hundred thousand dollars could make up his mind to give it up.

He knew that he would never have done such a thing.

No wonder, then, that he thought Thad green for having come all the way from Poland and then hunted him up to give him the money, when he could so easily have kept it without anybody being the wiser.

At length they reached the studio.

Thad left Moses in the front room while he went back with the ostensible purpose of getting the money.

When he returned he held a square package in his hand that attracted the Jew's attention so much that he didn't notice for a few seconds, that Thad had the cold muzzle of a revolver against his ear.

Moses attempted to spring out of range of the weapon, but Thad said, in a cold, commanding voice that brooked no refusal:

"Stop where you are! A single attempt to move will cost you your cursed life! Now turn round till I put the nippers on you."

The Jew was completely cowed, and arrant coward that he was, he had not courage to speak, much less offer resistance.

He quaked so with abject terror that he could scarcely stand upon his feet, and staggered like a drunken man when Thad whirled him round to put the handcuffs on.

As soon as he was handcuffed, Thad pushed him into a seat, and, sitting down in front of him said:

"Well, Moses, what do you think of your cousin now? You don't think he is quite so green as you did half an hour ago, do you?"

The Jew could only shake his head ruefully, and made no reply.

"You're a pretty sharp rascal," continued the detective, "but you met your match this time. Now, Moses, I have a few questions to ask you, and if you answer them straight I may conclude to give you your liberty; if not you will go to the Island for something like the balance of your natural life. I have enough against you to do it."

Moses groaned in dire distress.

"Now, the first thing I want to ask you is, do you know a man by the name of Dr. Amos Thurlow?"

The Jew nodded in the affirmative.

"What do you know about him?"

"Not'ing, except dot he vas sait to pe guilty of killing his own fat'er," replied the Jew.

"I know that already," said the detective. "Do you know of his committing any other crimes since?"

"No."

"Sure, now?"

"So helup me Gott."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"No, but I can find out."

"Good. Now, tell me, do you know anybody by the name of Sibyl Verne?"

"I used to; not lately."

"Who and what was she?"

"Vell, all I gan zay is, dot she vas a tramp efer since I've known any'ing about her."

"And you haven't seen her lately?"

"No."

"Did you know the man that was recently murdered, Morton Ainsworth?"

"Yes."

"What do you know about him?"

"Dot he vas a pigger rascal dan I vas, und dot ish useless."

"What?"

"Dot ish vot I sait."

"Moses," said the detective firmly, "I asked you to tell me the truth."

"Vell, if dot isn't der truth, der truth vas nefer spoken."

"Moses, how can you expect me to believe anything you say after such a falsehood as that?"

"It ish not a falsehood, sir!" cried Moses, vehemently.

"But I happen to know that it is."

"How you know dot?"

"Why, everybody—the very best people—speak of him as a model of uprightness and morality, sir."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the Jew. "I know dot. Dey always spoked vell of him, efen ven he vas in der midst of his vorst rasgalities."

"Very well, Moses; I know the proneness of the rogue to accuse all honest men. We will not

discuss that matter any further. I believe you have some papers which belonged to Doctor Thurlow or his father?"

This last venture was all guess-work on the part of the detective. He did not really know to whom the papers belonged, or what they pertained to exactly. The person in the yard had told him that Moses had some papers which would be valuable to the detective, and he hit upon this theory of his own accord.

But luckily it was a close guess.

The Jew changed color and trembled violently.

"How you know about dose papers?" he asked.

"Never mind, I know," retorted the detective, "and I must have them, or you'll never see the outside world again."

The fellow was silent for some moments, and the little manhood he possessed appeared to be struggling with the spirit of craven cowardice.

After a long time he succeeded in pulling himself together sufficiently to assume a dogged spirit of resistance.

"V'at you wants mit dose bapers, anyvay?" he growled, with a scowl.

"It makes no difference to you what I want with them, I want them, and what is more, I am going to have them, or you will pay dearly for it," proclaimed the detective, firmly.

"But I don't can get dem."

"Come, that won't do; I know that you can. Where are they?"

"I dunno."

"You do, sir!"

"No, I don't, I swear!"

"All right, I'll see if I can't refresh your memory a little."

With that he grabbed the Jew and pushed him through a door into a small, iron-lined cell, not more than three feet square, a rather uncomfortable place to stay in, inasmuch as you could not lie down.

"There now, my frien I," said Thad, "remain there a few days, and when you get real hungry and thirsty, push on this knob, and if I happen to be about, I may bring you something to eat and drink; but, remember, it will be of no use to push that knob unless you are ready to tell me where those papers are."

With that he started to close the door.

The moment the Jew saw the darkness closing in upon him he weakened.

"Hold on!" he cried, "I vill tell."

"I thought that would bring you to your senses," said Thad.

He led the culprit into the other room again.

"Now, tell me where those papers are, Moses," he demanded.

"Vill you turn me loose, v'en I tell you?" asked the cunning fellow.

"When I get possession of the papers I will. You can remain here while I go after them, and as soon as they are recovered I will return and set you at liberty."

"But, mine frien, you never can fint dose bapers py yourself. I vill haf ter go mit you; or v'at ish better, I vill go and bring dem."

"That would be an excellent plan, now, wouldn't it?" cried Thad, laughing at the fellow's bungling attempt to make his escape.

"Of course I know that you are too honest, Moses, not to return and fetch the papers; but suppose we don't do that way? It wouldn't look well for a detective to allow a noted criminal the privileges that you suggest. Now, just give me a detailed description of where the documents are to be found, and as soon as they are in my possession you will be a free man."

"It is impossible," persisted the Jew.

"In that case I must put you back in the cell again."

So saying, Thad grabbed hold of the fellow.

"No, no!" he cried, in terror. "Listen till I tell you."

"Well?" relaxing his hold.

"As I told you before I can't tell you so dot you gan find dem, but I vill go mit you and show you der place."

"Very well, we will do that then," asserted Thad. "But before we start you must give me directions, as near as you can, how to find them."

"V'at for?"

"Something might happen."

"You 'frait I run away?"

"No; I know there is no danger of that; but you might get too fresh or something on the way and cause me to knock you on the head."

Again the fellow hesitated.

"Come," said Thad, "time is precious, and I've wasted all the time on you that I care to. Spit it out now, or into the cell you go! And, mind you, I'm going off on a two or three days' trip; that may extend to a week, and you would get a trifle hungry before I get back."

At this suggestion the fellow finally but reluctantly yielded.

Thad sat down at a table with pen and ink, and as the Jew detailed the intricate plan of how to get at the papers, set them down upon paper.

The detective, acquainted as he was with the ways of the crooks of New York, and their various hiding-places and "fences," could not but be astonished at what he heard.

If what he heard and was inscribing was accurate, he would be in possession of the most elaborate details of thieves' retreats and "fences" ever heard of.

But it might not be correct.

He knew the Jew to be cunning and ingenious, and this might all be invention on his part to throw the detective off the right track, or what was equally bad, get him interested in an imaginary scheme, and while he was attempting to work it out, the Jew would effect his escape.

Thad thought of all this while he was inditing the account dictated by the Jew, but he considered it worth taking the chances for. He was accustomed to taking great chances, and knew that a detective's success depended largely upon hazard, and he went on writing, never questioning the most astounding assertions or Arabian Nights descriptions, or pretending for a moment that he doubted anything he heard.

At last it was done, and Thad announced his readiness to go.

He noticed a gleam of satisfaction and triumph in the rascal's eyes, which indicated that he believed that he would soon have the detective in a trap, and most men under the circumstances would have hesitated before plunging into it.

But Thad possessed abundant self-confidence, and a strong faith in his never-varying good fortune, which had stood him in stead so often in the past.

"Now, Moses," said Thad, when they were ready to go, "I am going to do a generous, and what some would call a foolhardy act. I am going to take your handcuffs off, as I do not care to go through the streets with a man in irons; besides it wouldn't look well for one Jew to be leading another in that condition. But mind you, any attempt on your part to either escape or betray me will result fatally for you. First let me disarm you," he continued, going through the fellow and removing several weapons which he found upon his person.

The Jew was a little crestfallen at this unexpected maneuver. He evidently calculated on making use of some of them in the course of the trip, if opportunity offered.

"Now," said the detective, "before I take the cuffs off of you, tell me where I can find Amos Thurlow."

The Jew scowled and was silent a moment.

"I vill," he said at length, "if you vill promise not to tell him v'ere I am—at least for twenty-four hours after I am vree."

"Why do you want me to promise you that?" asked the detective in surprise.

"Vell, I candt tell you dot, but it does no good to tell him v'ere I am."

The detective considered the matter and concluded that there would be no harm in making the promise, so he said:

"All right, Moses, I won't tell him where you are."

"Not efen dat I am in der city."

"All right."

"Or dat I am anyv'ere. I would rudder d'at fellow dinks I vas deat already," cried the Jew warmly.

"What's the matter with my putting a bullet through you then, and he would not only think you were dead, but he would know it," remarked Thad, laughing.

"No, no," cried the Jew with a shudder. "I don't vant d'at; I only wants him to dink so. Vill you promise?"

"Yes, I promise," replied Thad. "But look here, Moses, that fellow must have it in for you; how is it?"

"Maype he has, maype he hasn't; dot's my beesness."

"All right; Moses, let us know where he is to be found."

"Vell, you go to von huntred und dwentys-fifth streed, near Fifth avenue, No. —, dere you find a fine house v'at looks like der residence of a wealthy shendleman, but it vas not; it ish a hospital for young vimins v'at got some droubles. Vell, you tell dem d'at you got a case, you understand, und vants Doctor Barker. Offer you don't gan vork it now, it don't vas mine vault."

"Very well, Moses," said Thad, "I will manaze the rest, and I'm much obliged to you. Now I'll remove your bracelets."

"Yes, dake dem off, for aldough I likes shewelry, dem fellers pleases me too vell."

When Thad had removed the handcuffs, he conducted the Jew to the street, keeping him in front all the while.

As soon as they reached the street Thad called a closed hack and ordered the driver to go according to the Jew's directions.

This brought them after a long drive, to the East River near Ninetieth street:

"Here we cross the river, according to your directions," said Thad, when they had alighted from the hack.

"Yes, ve fints a small poat down here," replied the Jew, pointing in the direction of the river.

"A small boat?" cried Thad. "What's the objection to taking the ferry?"

"D'at would neffer do," affirmed the Jew stoutly. "Somepody would pe sure to pe apoard

v'at would know me, und den der fire would be in der fat."

"All right, then, let us take the small boat; just so we are quick about it," said the detective, pushing on.

A few moments later they were in a small row-boat pulling for the Long Island shore.

The tide was going out and it being so near Hell Gate, the current was swifter and difficult to stem.

However, Thad was a good oarsman, and with the Jew to steer, they were making good headway. In fact they were in the middle of the river, where the current comes whirling and dashing in zigzag eddies through Hell Gate, when all of a sudden the Jew stood up in the stern of the boat and said:

"Vell, mine frient, I guess you vill haf ter fint dem bapers alone. Goot-by!"

And before the detective could interfere or even have time to think what the man was about, he threw himself head-first into the dark, plunging river!

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED FIND.

THE shock produced by the Jew's sudden and unexpected action caused the detective to forget for the moment that he was managing a boat in a perilous position, and drop his oars.

The consequence was that the frail bark was caught by the mad, whirling waters and dashed along at a fearful rate.

In a few seconds he was many yards below the spot where Moses had plunged in, and beyond the power of rescuing him, even if the Jew desired to be rescued, which was doubtful.

It was growing dusk and the lights began to spring up along the docks and on the boats, and by their gleam Thad could scan the face of the water very clearly.

As soon as he had regained his self-possession, which was in a few seconds, he grasped the oar and rowed back to the spot where the Jew had jumped overboard, and watched the surface of the water intently for a long time, longer, indeed, than any mortal could have remained under the water and lived.

"Is it possible," he mused at last, "that the rascal has actually committed suicide? There must have been a great deal for him to fear in the recovery of those documents, or else in my finding Thurlow, that would force him to take his own life."

In the mean time the detective pulled leisurely along, undecided which way to go.

He had the written directions how to find the papers, but really there was no hurry about finding them.

Would it not be better policy to hunt up Thurlow first?

Thad thought it would, but upon second thought it occurred to him that the papers, in case they were in the place indicated in the directions, might be removed by some one interested.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Thad quickly righted the boat and pulled vigorously for the Long Island shore.

In fifteen minutes more he pulled the prow of his boat upon the narrow, pebbly beach and, taking a turn with her chain around a stranded spar, made his way up the bank and along it toward the Sound.

He followed this course, along the bank, until he came to where the river enters the Sound, and here he paused.

The directions said that he would find a small house here, occupied by an old hag who was supposed to earn her living by washing, but in reality kept a "fence" for the reception and concealment of stolen goods. The trouble was, in the darkness that had now settled down, to distinguish the house from a lot of other small shanties and cottages that lined the shore, but after gazing about him till his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, the detective stumbled on over rocks and tangled driftwood, and finally came to a very small, dingy wooden cottage, which he thought must be the right one.

To make sure, though, he lighted a match and held it up. To his gratification he read the sign:

MRS. MARY O'RAFFERTY,
WASHING & IRONING.

It was all dark within, but Thad tapped three times on the door, according to directions, and after a short wait somebody opened the door a couple of inches and asked who was there.

Thad saw that stratagem would have to be used, and he was equal to the occasion.

Imitating the voice and accent of Moses he said:

"Moses Ernstein, mine frient, let me in von't you?"

The person hesitated, and appeared to be conversing with some one else inside, but finally opened the door wide enough to admit him, and he glided in.

It was so dark inside that Thad could not

make out a single object, but before the person, whom he could not tell whether it was a man or a woman from the voice, struck a light, said, in a husky voice:

"How comes it ye be usin' yer roight name here, Mr. Jones?"

That was a hint to Thad. He had evidently made a bad break to start with. Of course he was not supposed to know that Moses was in the place.

If he could have foreseen the way things would turn out, he would have gained a few pointers from the Jew.

But he was in for it now and must have it through at any cost. As soon as there was a light he would have to change his tactics anyway but while he was in the dark his best policy was to keep up the delusion.

"O, mine cracious!" said he; "how vas I make dot plunder, v'ot? It seems to me gits more und more foolisher der longer v'at I life, ain't it?"

"Wal, it's lucky for yez that nobuddy but me an' Jimmy was round," growled the person, whom he now concluded must be Mrs. O' Rafferty. "Wal, pfat d'yez want, at all, Jonesy, me b'ye?"

"Der bapers, Mrs. Rafferty, mine tear," said Thad, putting his hand out in the dark with the idea of patting her on the cheek, but only succeeding in touching the back of her head.

"Oh, the divil fly away wid yel! How miny toimes wull yez be takin' thim papers away and bringin' 'em back again?"

"Dis ish der last time, mine tear. Dey hef offered big monish dis time, und I vas dake dem to dem to-night."

"Big money, is it? Phere the divil did Dr. Thurlow git big money to offer? He offered me fifty dollars wance, an' said that was ivery cent he had in the wurld, an' O'm sure ye don't be callin' that big money."

"Oh, mine gracious, mine tear! Doctor Thurlow vas fallen heir to a million tollars, und he ish ter gif five t'ousand for der bapers."

"He is, is he?" growled the woman. "Waal, Mr. Jones, whin you bring Doctor Thoorlow hyar and yez plank down wan-half uv that cash, yez'll git thim papers, and not before!"

"But, mine tear, how vas I to git der five t'ousand—"

"Ye heered phat Oi said, Mr. Jones. It'll be aisy enough gittin' him hyar wid his money if he wants the papers very bad."

"But, mine tear, he must haf der papers to-night, und don't got some time to come over."

"Let him take toime."

"V'at you vas afraid of, mine tear? You dink I don't vould gif you de monish?"

"That's just phat Oi am afraid av. Ye see, Jonesy, Oi know you betther than butther-milk, an' yez can't blarney me fer shucks. Oi'm anto yez wid both fate."

Thad saw that persuasion was futile, and something else must be done.

He knew from Moses's description that the papers were concealed beneath the hearth in the back room.

If the old woman would only strike a light so that he could see who there was in the room, and what he had to contend with, he would make short work of it; but it was rather hazardous attempting anything in the dark, and if he flashed his lantern and there should happen to be any one there it would give him a double advantage over the detective.

But after a moment's thought he concluded that that was the only thing to be done under the circumstances; so, listening intently for a moment to ascertain, if possible, how many there were in the room, what their location was, and being satisfied that there were not many, if any, he pressed the spring and shot a brilliant glow about the room.

The old woman was evidently badly frightened, for she sprung several feet backward and was on the point of screaming, but the sight of the pistol barrel pushed up close to her face caused her to become silent.

Noiseless as had been the whole proceedings, however, it must have been heard in the next room, for before Thad was aware of it a burly fellow was at his back, and dealt him a blow that sent him reeling to the floor.

The blow was fortunately too high up to inflict anything like a permanent injury, and the detective was scarcely down before he was upon his feet again, and turned upon the burly ruffian, who evidently did not expect to see him come to life again, and with a well-aimed sledge-hammer blow sent him sprawling to the floor.

The detective then turned his attention to the old woman, whom he found in a warlike attitude with a dagger in her hand.

When he turned his lantern upon her he could hardly restrain his laughter.

Never in his life had he seen such depravity coupled with so much frailty.

The old hag looked as if she might topple over with a breath, and yet there she was posed as a Borgia with knife in hand, ready to kill the first one that approached her.

Thad could hardly bring himself to attack so defenseless a creature, and probably would not have done so under any other circumstances.

But at present the exigencies were such that the most heroic measures were necessary, regardless of sex or conditions.

He regarded the frail, but defiant old woman for a moment, and then without a word, struck her weapon from her hand, and said:

"It's no use, old woman. I'm master of the situation, you see; turn round and let me put the cuffs on you."

She made some faint resistance, but soon saw that Thad was determined, and finally yielded.

Thad clapped the handcuffs upon her, and then took a look at her companion.

He was a big, burly ruffian, with a face that indicated a capability of doing anything, from picking a child's pocket to murder.

The fellow was badly stunned, but showed signs of recovery; so, to save trouble the detective locked a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists and a pair of shackles upon his ankles.

This done, Thad proceeded into the back room.

This was evidently used as a kitchen and bedroom combined, as there was an old-fashioned fireplace with a cheap stove in front of it, while on the opposite side of the room was a bed.

From the tumbled state of the latter, it was evident that the man with whom Thad had just had the encounter, had been lying down at the time he entered the shanty.

There was a capacious hearth constructed of stone flags in front of the fireplace, but upon which the stove stood.

To lift the stove and set it aside was a small matter, and the coast seemed clear to work upon the hearth.

Thad attempted to raise the flags, but was surprised and discomfited to find that they were cemented down.

He looked about for something with which to pry them up, but could find nothing.

He searched in every part of the cabin with the same result, and finally went out of doors at the rear.

Flashing his light about the back yard, he saw a lot of nondescript furniture and utensils, probably stolen from various places, and at last was gratified to find a crowbar setting up against the house.

With this he returned to the kitchen, and proceeded to work.

Forcing the crowbar down under the edge of one of the flags, he gave it a heroic wrench, and was gratified to see it raise from its setting of cement.

A few more efforts raised the stone clear above the level of the hearth, so that he could slip a billet of wood under it; and then dropping the crowbar, Thad took hold of the stone with his hands and lifted it out of the hearth and laid it to one side.

Under the flags he found a floor of boards laid lengthwise, so that he had to take out all the stones before he could remove even one of the boards.

This required some time, but he finally accomplished it.

He then removed the boards, and found the cavity below filled with shavings tightly packed down.

The detective went systematically to work and soon removed the shavings.

Now flashing his lantern down into the pit, he discovered that the contents, whatever they might be, were covered with a piece of carpet. This he removed, and found a lot of canvas bags set in so closely that their tops, tied together and fringed out, formed a regular bed, like buffalo robes.

He grasped hold of one of them and tugged with all his might; but could not move it from its place.

Could it be that these bags were filled with gold and silver?

Impossible! And yet what could they contain that would have possessed such immense weight?

The detective was in a quandary.

He must have those bags out, or at least the one containing the papers.

A happy thought occurred to him.

The bag containing the papers, if it were there would not be so heavy as the rest; why not find it, if possible?

He jumped down into the pit and began to lift at each bag in turn.

One after another was tugged at, but each in turn defied his best efforts to raise it.

Finally, when he had gone over nearly the entire lot of them, he came to one that yielded to his strength, and to his delight he saw it lifted out and laid upon the side of the hearth.

The bag was bound with a stout cord, and he whipped out his knife and severed it.

Inside the bag he found a mass of shavings, in the midst of which was a large Russia-leather pocketbook.

This evidently contained the papers, and without examining it he put it into his pocket.

The detective now turned his attention to the other bags. He could not lift them out, but he could open them and ascertain the nature of their contents.

Cutting one of the cords he thrust his hand into the bag.

"Heavens! what did he feel? Gold! and that in twenty-dollar pieces!

What should he do?

He could not lift one of the bags out entire, but he could fill his pockets. Still, this seemed so small in the presence of so much wealth that he dared not remove a coin.

Finally he decided to leave it for the present and bring some one to assist him at another time.

"For the present I will be content with the possession of these papers," he mused aloud, "and to-morrow—"

"What?"

Thunderstruck at the voice so close to him he looked up to see who had uttered the one magic word, and was horrified to see two big ruffians squatted there with big revolvers leveled at his head!

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLOSE CALL.

FOR a moment Thad was too much surprised to do anything but stare at his two captors.

The latter sat there cool and collected, a broad grin of satisfaction overspreading their villainous faces.

All this could be seen but dimly by the dark lantern, the light of which was turned toward the pit where the detective had been at work, and the reflection thrown back was all that lighted up the villains' faces. Still that was enough for Thad to see the kind of men he had to deal with, and he realized that "desperate" was a mild name for their characters.

He also felt that he was no match for them in a fair contest; even if they had not the drop on him.

Therefore, his only chance lay in stratagem.

All this flashed through his mind in the fraction of a minute, and while he was taking in the situation with his eyes, and his mind was made up what to do.

But before he had time to act, one of the men said:

"Wal, Sheeny, what ye doin' hyar, anyway?"

The reference to his appearance reminded Thad that he was still made up as a Jew, a fact that he had forgotten; but now that his memory was refreshed on the point, he decided to make use of it.

"Vell, I dunno," he said; "v'at you dinks?"

"I think," said the other, "that you're makin' rather free with what don't b'long to ye."

"Vas dat so?" returned Thad, in apparent surprise. "I t'ought all dot stuff pelongs by my cousin, Jonesy, what?"

"Wal, it don't, see?"

"Vell, all right; you don't need to get oxcited abowit it."

"Come out o' there," growled the other ruffian who had been silent up to that moment, "an' don't talk so much."

That was just what the detective wanted an opportunity to do. Once on *terra firma* and on a level with his antagonists, he would be less at a disadvantage.

So he climbed out of the pit without another word.

"Vell, shentlemens," he said, "I vas bid you a ferry goot evening; I musht pe going."

"I reckon not, jist yet," growled one of the men, bringing his revolver on a level with the detective's head.

"V'at's de maetter?" cried Thad, in apparent alarm.

"Hand over them papers, see?"

"Bapers? Oh mine cracicus! V'at you talk, alreaty? I don't vas got no bapers!"

"Lookkee hyar, Sheeny," growled the ruffian, "I ain't got no time to monkey wid you, see? Come, hand out dem papers, er I'll let 'er go quick!"

The situation was a desperate one.

Thad knew that the fellow would do just what he said.

There was only one thing to be done, and that must be done quickly and perfectly. Failure meant death; and the least flagging of self-confidence meant failure.

The fellow had turned with his back to the pit in order to face the detective, and his partner still stood at the other end, while the lantern, the only light in the gloomy room, stood at the edge of the pit where it had been all along, casting its white halo into the pit.

"Vell, offer I hafto, I expose I hafto," said Thad, in an apparently good-natured strain, diving into his side pocket as if to bring out the papers, "but I hate to, you bet."

The action for an instant served the purpose for which it was intended, namely—threw the ruffian off his guard.

But the next instant he appeared to realize his mistake, and yelled:

"None o' that Sheeny; throw up your hands, quick!"

It was too late, however. The agitation which the discovery of the action caused the fellow was the exact result sought by the cunning detective. He knew that the fellow would discover his mistake sooner or later and the

realization of his situation would throw him into a state of excitement.

Now was his time to act.

Pretending that he was going to throw up his arms, he threw his right out straight in front of him, striking the fellow in the jaw and hurling him backward into the pit, his pistol going off as he fell but the charge going harmlessly into the ceiling.

The other fellow was upon his feet in an instant, but Thad was ready for him.

The interruption caused by the other's fall had given the detective time to draw his revolver, so that by the time the other fellow rose in front of him he had him covered with his revolver.

"Throw up your hands!" cried Thad, in a cold, inflexible voice.

The fellow was no less surprised at the change of voice and accent than he was in the sudden and unexpected change in affairs, and he seemed paralyzed with terror.

He mechanically dropped his pistol and raised his hands.

"Now," said Thad, "just put your hands behind you, please, till I put a pair of bracelets on you."

The fellow complied without the slightest resistance, and Thad soon had him handcuffed.

He next looked to see what the other fellow, the one who had fallen into the pit, was doing all this time, and realized that in the excitement of the moment he had done a very foolish thing, in not looking after his man sooner. As luck would have it, the fellow had struck his head against the jam in falling, knocking him insensible, otherwise he might have made bad work for the detective.

He had fallen with his face down, so that the detective had no trouble in pulling his hands behind him and clasp the irons upon his wrists.

There was nothing more to be done now but to go and leave them, as having no bench warrant he had no authority to arrest them.

As he passed through the front room he found the old woman and Jimmy still lying on the floor where he left them, growling and swearing at a fearful rate.

Without paying heed to their imprecations, however, he passed out of the front door, and down into a sort of path that led into the suburbs of Astoria.

On his way he met a policeman, to whom he told the character of the house and what he would find if he went there at that particular moment.

The policeman looked at him suspiciously for a moment, and said:

"What ye givin' me, Sheeny? I know de place you speak of. De ole woman dat lives dere is a respectable, hard-workin' woman."

"All right," said Thad; "if you will take the trouble to go there now, you will see something that will surprise you. If you don't, I shall exercise my authority as a staff detective to see that you lose your badge."

"You a detective? Well, I like dat," sneered the policeman. "Now, if you don't go on 'bout yer business, I'll run ye in."

Seeing that there was no use of fooling away time with him, the detective took his number and went on.

Instead of going to his small boat again he took the ferry across the river.

His first action was to return to his rooms, remove his disguise, and then report his find of stolen goods to Inspector Byrnes, who he knew would report it to the Williamsburg authorities.

When this had been attended to, it just occurred to the detective that he hadn't eaten anything since early that morning, so he went to a restaurant to get his dinner.

While sitting at the table, waiting for his dinner to come in, and looking over the evening paper, two well-dressed gentlemen came in, and sat at the same table.

Thad paid no attention to them at first, or they to him. They were conversing in a confidential tone, and disguised their language in such a manner as to render it unintelligible to a stranger to the subject.

The first thing that attracted the detective's notice was this from the older one of the two, whom Thad then remarked was quite gray:

"Then, if it is as you say, the property will revert to Bettie, whether the marriage is declared valid or not."

"Of course," replied the younger man, "provided the papers can be found."

The reference to "papers" caused the detective to start instinctively, just as though there was but one set of papers in the world.

"Does anybody know where these papers are?" asked the elder man.

"No," replied the other. "The last that was heard of them they were in the hands of a Jew named Moses something or other; but it would be like hunting a needle in a haystack to try to find him."

"In that case, then, if the court declares the marriage legal, I do not see what is to hinder your sister from taking the property, or at least a third of it."

"There will be nothing to hinder it that I

know of," returned the young man; "but I shall use my influence with my sister not to touch or meddle with the property until this thing is settled. So far as I can see now, there is an ugly story behind all this, which may or may not come to light some day; but whether it does or not I would give a great deal more than his property amounts to if she had taken mother's advice and never married him."

"But this doctor that you speak of, may be dead," said the other.

"He may or he may not. If he is, all well and good; but if he should turn up and the papers should be found so that he can identify and at the same time clear himself, things will have an ugly appearance on the other side."

"Oh, well," sighed the elder man, "there are some strange things in this world. By the way, I understand the other folks have a detective at work upon the case."

"So I believe."

"Has he done anything?"

"About as much as detectives usually do, nose round among imaginary clues and theories, make a little noise and more expense, to finally flatten out and give the matter up as a bad job."

"What do you think of the theory that he was poisoned by some subtle drug?" asked the elder man, after a pause.

"I consider it nonsense," said the other; "if there had been any thing of that kind, don't you suppose the doctors would have discovered it in the system?"

"They ought; but how do you account for his death? The doctors are just as positive that he did not die of heart trouble or congestion of the brain."

"I know," said the other, a little impatiently. "I admit it is a very mysterious piece of business; but even if there could be any direct motive shown, you needn't tell me that a man can be poisoned without the drug exhibiting itself in his system."

The waiter brought in the gentleman's dinner at this point, as well as Thad's and the conversation took a turn in another direction.

As soon as Thad finished his meal he returned to his room to prepare for a visit to the hospital on 125th street.

He disguised himself as a well-to-do mechanic of middle age, and left the house.

As soon as he was seated in the carriage which he had employed to take him to the hospital, he began to ruminate over the events of the day just closed, and especially the conversation he had just heard.

That it referred to his case there was not the shadow of a doubt, and how the parties had managed to find out so much puzzled him.

One thing he was satisfied of, and that was that the young man was the brother of Ainsworth's bride, and being a gentleman, there would be no difficulty in getting possession of what he knew in the matter.

What puzzled him most was their reference to Bettie as probable heiress of the property.

Did they mean Bettie Parkinson?

And if so, how should she become heiress any more than her sister?

It couldn't be possible that she was not Louise's sister, and therefore, not Ainsworth's niece?

If so, how was she to become heiress? Could it be possible that she was his daughter? This was too absurd to think of for an instant, as Bettie had told him that Ainsworth had never been married.

Again, what claim would Thurlow, if he was the doctor referred to, have to the property?

All these questions presented themselves to him as he rode along, and served to kill the time so rapidly that he scarcely realized the fact that they had started, when the carriage stopped and the driver announced that they had arrived at the number desired.

It was now close upon midnight; very dark and to add to the general dreariness, it was beginning to rain.

After alighting from the carriage and telling the driver to wait for him around the corner of Fifth avenue, the detective rung the bell of the hospital, which, as Moses had told him, looked like a genteel private house.

After a short wait, the bell was answered by a colored footman.

"What's wantin', sah?" asked the servant, in a disparaging voice, scanning Thad's plain clothing.

"I want to see Doctor Barker," replied Thad.

"Doctor Barker ain't in, sah."

"When will he be in?"

"Not befo' to-morrow, sah. Ten to twelve, two to fo', is his hours, sah."

"Where does the doctor live?"

"Don't know, sah. De faculty don't give their addresses heah, sah. All cases must be treated on de premises."

Thad took the hint. The kind of treatment given at this institution was such that the faculty preferred to keep their addresses a secret, lest the police should find it too convenient to find them some time.

"There is no way of seeing the doctor, then, except by coming here within his office hours to-morrow, I suppose?" said he.

"Dat's de bes' you can do," replied the negro, preparing to close the door.

Disappointed and disgusted, the detective descended the marble steps and returned to his carriage.

He instructed the driver to drive past the hospital again, hoping thereby to see something that would give him a clue to the mystery of the place.

He was surprised, on turning the corner again, to see a carriage standing in front of the door, and a lady at the door.

As his carriage rolled slowly by, he heard either the lady or the footman pronounce the name "Barker."

Thad had himself driven to the next corner, where he got out and walked back to within a few doors of the hospital entrance, keeping in the shadow of the buildings.

While he stood there watching, a man came to the door, and Thad heard the lady say "Barker," after which they both descended the steps and entered the carriage and drove away.

Hurrying back to his own carriage, Thad gave the order to the driver to follow the other carriage, wherever it went.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHASE AFTER "BARKER."

THE carriage containing the man and woman bowled along One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street until it came to Eighth avenue, and turned down that thoroughfare.

Thad's carriage was only half a block behind when the other turned, and he kept a sharp eye upon it.

For a long time the first carriage kept straight on down the avenue, and Thad began to wonder where it would stop, and also to think that the hospital's patronage must extend a long ways from home.

And then another thing occurred to him: Why had they given him to understand that he could not see Dr. Barker that night; and yet he had gone with the very next applicant?

There were but two explanations to the mystery. One was that he had come afoot instead of a carriage and wore plain clothes, and the other was, that the doctor was not going to see a patient at all.

He became convinced of the latter theory a short time afterward when he saw the carriage slacken its pace and drive leisurely along.

On and on went the carriage until it reached Forty-second street, and here it turned toward Broadway.

The carriage only went a half a block in this direction, however, and stopped.

As Thad drove on up he saw the man and woman alight and enter a house, and the carriage drive away.

This puzzled the detective.

If the doctor had been called to see a patient why had the carriage not waited for him?

But on second thought he remembered that the woman had called for him in her carriage, and the doctor probably intended returning by the elevated railway. If so, the detective would have a splendid opportunity to meet and perhaps interview him.

In the mean time he had alighted from his own carriage and approached the house on foot.

To his surprise there were two or three doctors' signs on the door-jamb, one of which read:

"DR. W. C. BARKER."

"This, then, is where he lives," mused Thad. "I'm luckier than I even hoped for. Now, the question is, had I better ring the bell and call for Dr. Barker, or wait till he comes out and accost him."

He decided upon the former course, and trumped up an excuse for calling, for in reality he had no charge against the doctor directly, more than the hint thrown out by The Owl, which, after all, might be false, so he realized that he must proceed very cautiously.

Thad stepped up and rung the bell, which was answered a moment later by an old lady.

"Is Doctor Barker in?" asked Thad.

"He is," was the reply.

But as the doctor was busy at the moment the detective was taken into a sitting-room and left alone for a long time to await his turn with the doctor.

As is natural with a person left alone in a room, his eyes wandered about the wall in search of something to feast upon, and they had not made half the circuit of the room when they were gratified beyond expectation.

For it must be admitted that Thad had an eye for the beautiful.

There before him hung a painting of one of the most beautiful women he had ever beheld. Her face and figure were almost divine, while her soft-blue eyes and mass of light golden hair were too angelic to be real, he thought, and yet he had seen that face somewhere.

Somehow his mind instantly reverted to Bettie Parkinson, but she was a brunette, with black eyes and hair and olive complexion. Still, there was something in the face before him that reminded him of Bettie; but when he came to study the face he felt sure that he had seen a closer resemblance to it somewhere else, but where he could not tell.

While he was studying the picture and trying to remember where he had seen the original, the old lady came into tell him that the doctor was ready to see him.

Thad walked mechanically into the doctor's consultation room, but his mind was so much engrossed with the face he had seen that he was at a loss for a moment what excuse to offer for his visit.

The doctor must have noticed this, for he said rather gruffly:

"Well, my man, what is it?"

Instantly pulling himself together and cudgeling his wits, the detective answered:

"I've an ache 'ere in me back, sur."

Thad knew that that was a malady that the doctor could not discover the presence or absence of and so he was safe from detection.

"What kind of an ache?" demanded the doctor, sharply.

"I dunno, sur; just, I reckon, an ordinary ache."

"Been lifting?"

"A bit, sur."

"Ah, that's it. Sleep well?"

"No, sur, I can't sleep for the pain of it sur."

"How's your appetite?"

"Middlin', thanks."

"All right, my man, sit down," said the doctor. "I'll give you a prescription."

"Thanks," said Thad, sinking into an easy-chair.

In doing so, he was careful to get a position where he could study the doctor's face.

For some reason or other he could not bring himself to associate it with that of Dr. Thurlow, although he had never seen him.

While the doctor was writing the detective's brain was busy trying to invent some way of drawing the doctor out and making him expose his real character. Finally he said:

"I 'aven't 'ad this trouble afore in a good many year. I used to be troubled a good deal w'en I was sailin' on the lakes up North, and about seventeen or eighteen year ago, we put in at Cleveland, Ohio, on Lake Erie, and there I run acrost a doctor that cured me up in no time. I don't think there ever was a doctor like him. Let's see, what's this his name was: Furlow, Shurlow, Thurlow, that's the name. I tell ye what, he was a maester, sur."

Thad watched the doctor's face, but to his surprise it did not show the slightest change of expression.

The doctor merely said:

"Wonderful doctor, eh?" with an indulgent laugh.

"You didn't never know this Doctor Thurlow, did ye, sur?" asked Thad, still watching his expression.

"No," was the cold reply.

"I didn't know but ye might," went on the detective. "He left Cleveland several year ago, and I understood that he came to New York or some place East."

The doctor was silent for some moments, and appeared to be absorbed in his writing, and Thad imagined that he hadn't noticed his last remark, but after awhile he said, in an absent sort of way:

"I do know a Doctor Thurlow, but I don't think he came from the West."

"Where could I find him, sur?"

"I don't know that you can find him," returned the doctor, brusquely.

"I'm awful sorry, sur, for if it's the same one that I used to know, I'd give the world to see him, sur."

"It would do you no good to see him—that is, this doctor, because he doesn't treat your kind of cases. He treats nothing but women's diseases. If there is anything of that kind in your family at any time call on me and ask for him."

"How old a man is this Doctor Thurlow, sur?" asked Thad, rather abruptly.

"Close on to forty-five, I should think," said the doctor.

"Yes, that's about the age he would be if it was the same man, and looks a good deal like yourself, sur."

The doctor was very light, almost a blonde.

"Like me?" exclaimed the doctor, in surprise.

"Then this is not the same man, for Doctor Thurlow is very dark."

This was a bad break on Thad's part, and he saw it after it was too late.

He doubly realized the extent and fatality of his mistake when the doctor, after telling him how to use the medicine he had prescribed, arose, and, pointing at a picture on the wall, said:

"This is our Doctor Thurlow. Do you see any resemblance in him to myself?"

"No, sir," replied Thad, rather bitterly, in spite of himself.

The picture represented a dark, full-bearded man, with a piercing black eye, and the detective did see a resemblance in it to somebody, and that was Bettie Parkinson.

This circumstance set him to thinking.

Evidently there was a relationship of some kind between Dr. Thurlow and Bettie Parkinson, but what?

It could not be possible that she was his daughter, for if so, why had she been passed off as Ainsworth's sister? It wasn't possible that

Ainsworth was Thurlow's son? No, that could not be, he was too old.

And then the detective thought of what he had heard in the restaurant about Bettie being a possible heiress to the Ainsworth estate, and that knocked all the other theories in the head.

But at this moment he thought of the papers, which would doubtless clear up everything, and he made his mind easy, determining that as soon as he got back to his room he would read them.

With this resolution he took his leave of Dr. Barker, who, by the way, he was satisfied was not Thurlow.

His idea now was to first read the papers, and then, in some other disguise, make an attempt to see Thurlow.

As he had discharged his carriage upon entering the doctor's house, Thad walked down to Eighth avenue, and took the horse-cars on that road, which would take him within half a block of his "studio."

It was not long before he reached his rooms, and although it was long after midnight, he determined to read, or at least glance over the papers before going to bed, and for this purpose lighted his student-lamp and threw himself into a comfortable chair by the side of the table.

Drawing the great ponderous pocketbook from his inside pocket, he opened it, and the first thing that attracted his attention was two photographs, one of a strange man with a handsome, but rather crafty face, and the other of the same beautiful woman of whom he had seen the picture in Dr. Barker's house.

Written upon the lower margin of one was the name "Myra," and upon the other "Morton."

For some reason the detective could not take his eyes off the pictures for a long time.

They seemed to fascinate him.

Minute after minute passed, and still his eyes were riveted upon the pictures, especially the one of the woman, and still the papers lay unread, or even opened.

How long he sat thus he could not tell; it might have been minutes, or hours, as both were alike to him in this charmed land of dreams; when he at last became conscious that there was a presence near him.

Even then he could scarcely tear his eyes away from the fascinating pictures long enough to look up.

But, he finally did look up, and was astonished at what he saw.

Was he dreaming, or had the painting in that room in Dr. Barker's house walked from its frame, and now stood before him?

Whether it had or not, its very image was there, and if Thad had been the least superstitious, he would certainly have believed it to be a ghost.

But, as he was not superstitious, he decided that it was a very handsome woman, somewhat older than the picture, perhaps, but still strikingly beautiful; and his only wonder was, first, how she had got there; and second, what she wanted.

Before he had time to speak, however, the woman or spirit, introduced herself, and commenced the conversation.

"This is Detective Burr, I believe?" she began, in a musical voice.

"It is, madam," said Thad, rising and bowing.

"Take a seat, madam."

"Thank you," she said, wearily, sinking into an easy-chair. "You are surprised to see me here, I presume."

"Yes, I am surprised," replied Thad, "because I was under the impression that I had locked the door."

"Doubtless you did," she said, with a little laugh; "but you forget that you have a secret entrance to your apartments."

"I had forgotten it for the moment," he rejoined, in great surprise; "but even if I had thought of it, I was not aware that it was so well known to people in general."

"It probably is not," she said, with another little laugh; "but as I don't happen to be people in general, I do know about it, and as I didn't know but you might have your front door locked, I availed myself of this secret entrance."

"Very good, madam," said Thad, unable to suppress a smile at her easy assurance; "and now that you are here, what can I do for you?"

"Nothing in particular, except to listen," she said, throwing herself back in a more comfortable position. "The fact is, I have a great deal to tell you, but I cannot tell you all at this time. Wait till you have read those papers," she went on, pointing to the package of papers on the table; "and then I will see you again and tell you what they simply hint at."

"First of all, madam," interrupted Thad, "please inform me who you are."

"Sibyl Verne!"

"What?"

"Don't get excited," she said in a quiet voice, accompanied by a soft little laugh that had a note of melancholy in it. "You start now at the sound of my name—wait till you have heard my story and you will shudder—that is, at the

beginning of the recital, for that will be the end of the story. When you hear the beginning, therefore, which is the end, that is the sequel, you will want to hang me; but when you have heard all, you will pity me from the bottom of your heart, and want to commit murder to avenge my wrongs. Oh, Mr. Burr, if you could imagine one-millionth part of what I have suffered you would wonder why I had been so patient and enduring all these years.

"Imagine, sir, if you can, having your heart picked apart, bit by bit, for seventeen, long, weary, agonizing years, and still compelled to live, to suffer, and to see those who have dragged you to the depths and caused you to suffer the tortures of the damned, prosperous and happy!"

"Imagine this, if you can, sir, and then say whether you blame me for the act."

"What act?" demanded Thad, stupefied with astonishment at what he had heard.

"Murder!" she replied.

"Whom?"

"Morton Ainsworth!"

"Then, it was you?"

"Yes."

The detective attempted instinctively to dart at the woman, but found himself unable to move.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed. "I told you you would want to hang me; when you hear the rest you will change your mind. Farewell." And she was gone.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER VISITOR.

THAD'S last recollection was of seeing the beautiful woman glide, or as it seemed to him, melt away, as the world slipped away from him.

How long he lay unconscious he could not tell.

When he came to himself the sun was high in the heavens and shining across his feet, causing them to be uncomfortably hot.

He also felt a nausea at his stomach as though he had been drugged, and a general nervousness.

It took him some time to collect his thoughts, and when he did succeed in bringing his mind to bear upon anything in particular, the events of the previous day seemed like a wild, fantastic dream.

Especially did the last part of it, the scene with the woman.

For a long time he did not even question the fact that that was a dream.

The first thing that caused him to doubt that it was a dream was the discovery of a slip of paper lying in front of him on the table, with the following written on it:

"MR. THADDEUS BURR:—

"Forgive me for acting as I did; but I could not help it. It had to be. You shall hear the balance of the story in good time; but not yet. You will understand why I did not want you to know all just yet, all in good time. When the time has come you shall know everything; but it would frustrate my scheme to permit it yet awhile. That is why I took the papers. They, too, will be delivered to you at the proper time, and it will be idle for you to search for them or waste your good time looking for me.

"Farewell. Bide your time and be patient, for a short time. I have done it, remember, for seventeen years, but carried my point in the end.

"Yours sincerely,

"SIBYL VERNE."

When he came to look for the papers, sure enough they were gone.

The detective was mystified and discouraged. What could it all mean?

He was half inclined to believe now that this woman was some spirit or demon in human form.

And he was in a quandary whether to take her advice and await developments, or make an extra effort to find her and the papers.

Finally he decided to take her advice for the present, and bide his time; but in the meantime he would make an effort to see Thurlow.

Somehow he did not believe now that Thurlow was guilty, nor could he, in spite of what she had admitted, believe this strange woman to be a willful murderess.

The detective arose and went into his dressing-room, and in the course of half an hour came forth the image of a polished young gentleman.

He was about starting out when there came a knock at the door.

Upon opening the door he was surprised to find young Mr. Cockerall, the young man whom he had heard talking in the restaurant.

"Is this the office of Mr. Burr, the detective?" asked the young man.

"It is, sir," replied Thad; "what can I do for you?"

"I would like to see Mr. Burr," rejoined the young man, looking about.

"That is my name," said Thad. "Come in."

The young man walked in and glanced about him curiously.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "where did you say the detective is?"

"I am the detective," said Thad, smiling at his incredulity.

"You?" he cried, staring at Thad, incredulously.

"Yes; why?"

"I thought—that—that—I beg your pardon, but my impression was that Mr. Burr was a much older man."

"That depends upon how you see him," said Thad, laughing. "Mr. Burr is old or young according to circumstances."

"Ah, I see," said the young man, taking the hint at last. "You are in your regimentals, so to speak."

"That's it."

"Well, Mr. Burr, I want to speak to you regarding this case upon which you are at work."

"Very well, Mr.— I beg your pardon your name is Cockerall, I believe."

"Yes," replied the other, in surprise. "How did you know?"

"You will be surprised when I tell you. I was sitting at the same table in a restaurant the other evening with you, and overheard, unintentionally, some interesting conversation between yourself and an old gentleman."

"Indeed," exclaimed the young man. "Was that you? I noticed a man sitting at the table but paid no attention to him, as he didn't appear to take any notice of us. Well, that is odd. Well, what I was going to say is, that I have come in possession of a few facts that may be of use to you."

"I shall be glad to receive anything in the way of facts, sir."

"In the first place, I want to ask you what your theory is regarding the death of Ainsworth."

"That he was murdered, of course."

"But how?"

"Oh, that is another matter," returned Thad. "What I know in the matter is not theory; it is fact; but for the present I must keep it to myself."

"Very well, I do not want to intrude upon your professional secrets, much less steal them, Mr. Burr, but I have made a discovery which I don't mind telling you, and you will know whether it corresponds with what you have discovered or not."

"Thank you, Mr. Cockerall," said Thad, a little embarrassed by the young man's generosity on the heels of his own crustiness; "you will pardon me for my crustiness, as I see now that you are no mere scandal-seeker, as I was inclined to think you at first, and if your discovery corresponds with mine you shall know it. Proceed, if you please."

"Well, to begin with, I will assure you that your story is the same as mine, that is, that Ainsworth came to his death by means of a subtle poison, or rather a subtle drug, which is administered by vaporizing."

"Well?"

"Well, now I'll tell you my discovery. You have seen a weak-minded young man about the Parkinsons', I presume?"

"Yes; Montagu, commonly known as The Owl."

"The same; though I have come to the conclusion that he is not half the idiot he would have people believe."

"Why?"

"Listen. As I was returning home late the other night, or more correctly speaking, the other morning, for it was after midnight, my way lay past the church in which my sister was married, and in the yard of which Ainsworth is buried. Well, just as I got opposite the churchyard I thought I saw somebody moving around among the tombs."

"I thought it a little strange at that time of night, and thought at first that I must be mistaken; but after watching for a little while, I saw the figure several times so plainly that there could be no mistake."

"My next impression was that it was some tramp looking about for a dry place to sleep; still my curiosity led me to try to enter the yard, but, as I might have expected, the gate was locked."

"This surprised me very much, and I asked myself 'How did the other party get in?'"

"My curiosity was thoroughly aroused now, and as the party was at the rear of the yard, I went round to that side, keeping in the shadow, of course, to see if I could ascertain who the mysterious person was."

"To my surprise, on my arrival at the rear of the yard, I saw that there were two persons instead of one, and that one of them was a woman!"

"A woman?" cried the detective.

"Yes, a woman."

"What was she like? An old stoop-over creature, that walked with a stick?"

"Yes; at least that is what she seemed at first, but—"

"Not when you had a closer view of her. That is the same one that I saw. Go on."

"When I saw that there were two, and before I noticed that one was a woman, I thought of grave-robbers, and was on the point of running away to give the alarm, but just then I saw that one of them was, to all appearances, an old hag."

"I tell you, sir, I don't take any stock in ghosts, much less witches; but when I saw that old creature leaning on her twisted stick, and her long white hair—"

"White hair?"

"That is what I imagined it was at first. I afterward discovered different. But, as I was saying, when I saw that old hag silhouetted in the bright moonlight against a marble slab, I experienced a queer sensation."

"Still, I summoned courage enough to stay right there, and see what was going on; I even tried to get inside, but the back gate, like the front, was locked, so I laid down outside and watched."

"Well, pretty soon the woman was joined by a man, who, up to that time, had been in another part of the lot, and he handed her a small tin or silver box, and they began to talk about it. Then I discovered that the man was none other than Montagu, or The Owl."

"What did they say?" asked Thad, now thoroughly interested.

"I could not catch all they said," continued Cockerall; "but from what I did catch I inferred that the box contained some kind of a powder."

"Was there anything said that led you to believe that they had ever made use of it for murderous purposes, or intended to use it?"

"No; I listened for that particularly; but nothing was said or even hinted that would lead any one to believe that they ever had used or even intended to use it for that purpose. What they seemed to be discussing was who invented it and how it could be used."

"Who did they say invented it?"

"I didn't catch the name. It sounded as though she—it was the woman who appeared to know—said Ainsworth, but I know I must be mistaken."

"And still you might not have been mistaken. Who knows?" said Thad.

"It would be a little curious if it should turn out that this man was killed by the agent of his own invention, wouldn't it?"

"Yes; and yet stranger things than that happen every day," said Thad. "Well, what else did you hear?"

"Very little, except that the woman was eloquent in her denunciation of Ainsworth, which led me to the conclusion, inasmuch as she was in possession of this deadly drug, that she was probably the murderess."

"Still she did not say so in so many words, or hint at it?"

"No."

"Did you learn how they came to be out in the churchyard at that time of night; and also, how they succeeded in getting in?"

"No. Though I inferred that the meeting at that place and at that time of night was because The Owl could not get away at any other time; and as for their getting into the churchyard, that was the simplest thing in the world—the woman had a key."

"Yes, I know she had."

"How did you know it?" asked Cockerall in surprise.

"I discovered her in there the other day, and when I attempted to catch her, she made her escape through the back gate, and locked it in my face."

"I shall see the sexton about this matter," said the young man. "I cannot imagine what she is doing with a key to a graveyard. It is the strangest thing I ever heard of."

"It is strange," said Thad. "But tell me, who do you imagine this woman is?"

"I cannot imagine."

"Do you think she is the same as the woman called Sibyl Verne?"

"Now that you speak of it, I remember that The Owl called her Sibyl."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Thad, in astonishment. "Then, sir, she is not an old hag, as you imagined, at all; but on the contrary a young or youngish woman, and remarkably handsome?"

"Just what I discovered later, and would have told you if you had let me alone," replied the young man, apparently a little piqued at being thus anticipated. "But let me get back to my story. After a long and earnest conversation between the twain, they finally left the churchyard, walking so close to me in my concealment that I could have touched the woman's dress by putting out my hand."

"When they got outside they separated, she going in one direction and he in another."

But before they separated I heard a portion of the conversation that passed between them outside, from which I took it that she was going to make an effort to get possession of some papers, and if she succeeded she was going away somewhere to see some one the name of whom I could not grasp."

"As the woman turned to go the moon shone full in her face, and I saw, as you say, that she was a woman of remarkable beauty."

"What is your theory, Mr. Cockerall," asked Thad, "with regard to these people? Do you think this idiot is a dupe of the woman, probably doing her bidding?"

"That was not the impression I got from the conversation I overheard," said he. "On the contrary, I should infer that the fellow is to some extent her master."

"You don't say?" cried Thad, in surprise.

"This puts a new face upon the case, then."

"Yes, she appeared to take instructions from

him. Now, with regard to these papers, from what I caught of the conversation, I judged that they refer to some property—I should say to Ainsworth's property. It appears that it all belongs to somebody else, a doctor, who, if he could be found, would claim it for himself and heir. And whom do you think his heir, or heirs, is?"

"I have an idea from what I heard you say in the restaurant, Bettie Parkinson."

"Yes. It seems, if these people are to be believed, that she is not a Parkinson at all, but the daughter of this doctor. In my opinion this doctor knows something about this murder, that is, if he is living, and as likely as not it is all a conspiracy to get Ainsworth out of the way and get his property."

"Then you do not believe the story about Bettie not being a Parkinson?"

"Yes, I believe that part of it. Anybody can see at a glance that she is no relation to old Mrs. Parkinson or Louise. Bettie looks like a lady; they show their vulgar origin in every line of their faces and every gesture."

"Where do you think the conspiracy comes in, then?"

"I believe these people, knowing that Bettie is an adopted child, have trumped up a conspiracy, possibly forged papers which are to be accidentally discovered, bequeathing the property to her, etc.; in other words, making her the innocent subject of their fraudulent scheme."

"Why her?"

"Why her? Because, for one thing, this Montagu is in love with her, although she detests him, as is natural. Now, Mr. Burr, I think we should, of all things, try to find this doctor. I may as well tell you that I am interested, because—Bettie and I are betrothed."

"You don't say! Allow me to congratulate you, old man, on having a—"

But an exclamation from the young man caused Thad to pause and look.

The young man had picked up the photograph of the man and beautiful woman, which Thad had dropped upon the floor.

"Morton Ainsworth and Sibyl Verne!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW PHASE.

FOR some moments the young man sat gazing at the pictures, apparently as deeply entranced as Thad had been at the sight of them.

Finally he asked in an abstracted way, more as if he were asking himself the question than any one else:

"Where did these pictures come from?"

Thad was as much surprised at sight of them as he was.

Upon recovering from his hypnotic spell, or whatever it was, and discovering that the papers were gone, he naturally never thought of the pictures again; or if he did give them a thought, it was only to suppose that the woman had taken them also.

And now at their sudden reappearance, the detective was too much surprised to answer the young man's question at once.

Finally he made out to say:

"Pardon me, Mr. Cockerall, if I say that I cannot tell just yet where I obtained those pictures; but I promise you that as soon as I am permitted to tell any one, you shall be the first to know."

"I shall not insist upon knowing," the young man said, "and my reason for asking was that, seeing the two pictures together, bears out to some extent a theory I had partly formulated, namely, that this woman was probably a great deal to Ainsworth, and he to her at one time, and it may be that his murder may yet be traced to this woman, and that there is extenuation on her side."

"What do you mean?"

"That she has suffered that at his hands which in the eyes of justice and mercy, if not of law, justified her in killing him."

"You astonish me, Cockerall," said Thad.

"Is there not reason in the theory?" cried the young man, warmly.

"Yes, it is full of reason and judgment; my cause for surprise was, that you had unconsciously hit upon, not a theory, but what appears to be a fact. But I will explain this to you some other time. Let us get back to what we were talking about before you found the pictures."

"Oh, yes, I was going to say that we must find this doctor; for although this woman is doubtless largely responsible for the murder, to avenge some terrible wrong, I believe that there is a plot, a conspiracy back of it all, a scheme where money is the object, and this poor creature has been encouraged, probably incited to carry out her part of the plot by those who expect to profit by it."

"In the way of part verification of this theory, I want to show, or rather turn over to you a letter which I found in the cemetery after these people left."

"But first let me tell you. After they were gone, I managed to climb the fence, which you know is of iron and about ten feet high, and made a search about the spot where I had seen

them. That part of the cemetery was in shadow by this time, the moon having got down behind the church; but by dint of lighting matches I first discovered that they had spilt some of the powder out of the silver or tin box and afterward a letter.

"I was afraid to go near the powder at first, but recollecting that the woman said that the stuff was harmless except when etherized or vaporized by a strong perfume, I grew bold enough to gather some of it up, and here it is," he went on, placing a folded paper, similar in form to the papers containing powders put up by doctors, upon the table. "My idea is to have it analyzed by some expert chemist and find out whether there is anything deadly about it or not."

"Yes," said Thad, looking at the package critically. "If you have no objection, Mr. Cockerall, I will attend to this, as I desire to take it to the same chemist who examined the—but you did not know that I had had the bouquet which was given to Ainsworth by the little girl, examined, did you?"

"No."

"Well, I did; and I will tell you this much, *sub rosa*, that a few grains of a powerful compound, similar in its action to what you describe this to be, were found in the flowers. This, as I say, must be kept strictly confidential for the present. However, as I was saying, I should like to have the same chemist examine this and ascertain whether it is the same or not. If it is, I will have a strong enough case to justify me in arresting the woman, and once we can do that I imagine the rest will be very simple."

"Very well, sir, you shall manage that part of it, with pleasure," said the young man; "but I fear we are a little slow about arresting the woman."

"Why so?"

"She is gone, I imagine. That is, if she got possession of the papers, as she expected to do."

"Heavens!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

The young man evidently saw by the detective's face that something was the matter.

And the matter was that he, and he alone, knew that she had the papers, and if her going only depended upon that, she was probably gone.

The thought of such a thing, which, unless he should succeed in finding the woman, would frustrate all his plans, caused him such a shock that he could not help showing it in the expression of his face.

The detective was silent for some time.

At length he said:

"You did not ascertain or get any inkling of where she would probably go, did you?"

"No; but if she calculates to use the papers for the purpose of securing the property, she will probably go to Cleveland, Ohio, as there is where most of it is. The estate at Newburg is the smallest part of the Ainsworths' property."

"Good!" exclaimed Thad, brightening up. "Then all hope is not gone yet. But let us see what the letter is about."

"Yes, read that," said the other, producing a folded letter. "It will doubtless throw some light upon the subject, in connection with your discoveries."

Thad unfolded the letter and read the following:

"Dear M., it began, and here the detective paused and glanced at the photograph. Yes, it was the same 'Myra.' Then, whoever Myra was, she was evidently the same as Sibyl, therefore he concluded that the letter was addressed to her.

"As you suggest," the letter continued, "the time has come to act."

"As I promised, everything shall go to Bettie as soon as possession is gained. I want nothing, need nothing of it, and she will probably take care of you."

"Regarding your past in the other matter, do as you like. You, too, have suffered, I suppose, at his hands, and want your revenge, although you deserved all you received; but we shall not speak of that now. But my advice would be, *do not kill*. It will be possible, with your art to carry out a plan which will insure the same success without staining our hands with blood."

"The only object that we can have in the matter is to establish our title to the property, and my innocence. This cannot be done while he lives, or at least is supposed to live."

"Now, let me suggest a plan:

"Suppose, instead of dying, he would suppose to die. Do you understand? You can easily accomplish this. The doctors will hold a post-mortem examination. They will kill him. Do you understand? The doctors, not you, will be the murderers. But they won't mind it, as they are used to doing that sort of thing. Of course they will know before they have fairly begun their examination that the man was alive when they began, but it will be too late then, and they will never admit that they killed him."

"Or, if you have scruples which even deter you from going this far, your abduction scheme can be carried out in the same way, simply by

substituting some other subject for the doctors to work on. M. and M. will arrange that very easily."

"After the doctors get through it will be an easy matter to replace the other again; and after the funeral he can be spirited away, and the subject put in his place in the coffin."

"Of course, if you find the sworn statement of L. among the papers, M. will have to clear out. In fact the establishing of my innocence in any way will be his condemnation."

"Leaving all in your hands, and hoping you will do for the best, I remain,

"As ever,

A."

Thad was silent for a long time after reading the letter, and plunged in deep thought.

He was so deeply absorbed, and so oblivious to the physical world, that he started as from a sleep when the young man finally addressed him, thus:

"Well, sir, did you find any light in the letter in connection with your other discoveries?"

"A little; but more mystery," said Thad gloomily. "Where one point is cleared up a half-dozen are more deeply involved than ever. For instance, it is clear to me now that Myra, that is to say, Sibyl Verne, is involved in the matter, but how is more of a mystery than before. The discovery of the deadly compound, first in the bouquet which she was known to have touched, and then in her possession, if the analysis proves this to be the same, seemed to point directly to her guilt. But according to this letter it is not certain whether she or anybody else murdered Ainsworth; in fact, whether he is dead or not."

"What do you mean?" asked the young man, who was evidently mystified with some portions of the letter which were clear enough to the detective.

"What do I mean?" said the Thad, impatiently. "Don't you understand the letter?"

"There are portions of it which I confess that I do not. That portion, for instance, where it speaks of replacing somebody with a 'subject,' and abduction, and all that sort of thing."

"Well, I will explain it to you. This woman—but of course you did not know that—is gifted with that wonderful but devilish art or power, known as hypnotism. This person, whoever it is that is writing to her, advises her not to kill, but instead to put him under a hypnotic spell, which would make him appear to be dead; and then before the doctors got ready to hold their autopsy she would remove the body, and replace it with a 'subject,' that is another body, probably from the hospital, for the doctors to work upon. And then, when they had got through with their work and gone, these wretches would slip the hypnotized body back again to be mourned over and buried. Then finally, when all was over, they would steal him from the grave and substitute the 'subject' once more and spirit away the hypnotized man to some out-of-the-way place, where they would hold him until he had signed over all his property to the conspirators."

"Who do you imagine the author of this letter is?" asked Cockerall.

"It is impossible to tell; possibly this doctor, who, of course, is Doctor Thurlow, Bettie's father, or supposed father, according to our theory."

"And M. and M., who do you suppose they are?"

"Montagu for one; as for the other, it might be Moses, the name of the Jew who was in possession of the papers."

"Well, Mr. Burr, do you imagine this plot could be carried out successfully?"

"There is no reason why it couldn't if there were enough into it. Who knows? Possibly some of your Newburg doctors are mixed up in it. There appears to be money enough involved to make it an object for a good many people to take a hand in it. Whether they have carried it out is another matter. That can only be ascertained by having the body taken up; and I wish, Mr. Cockerall, you would attend to that part of it. I have several other matters that claim my attention. First of all, I must see Thurlow."

"But how am I to manage this affair?"

"Get an order from your police justice or justice of the peace to have the body exhumed. Here is the certificate of the leading chemist of New York City, that there was a deadly poison or compound in the bouquet; take it to the justice and he will order the body taken up quickly enough."

"Very well, Mr. Burr, I will attend to this at once. When shall I hear from you?"

"Just as soon as I hear from you. If the body has been exchanged, telegraph me the single word 'Exchanged,' if not, just 'O. K.' In either case I will procure a warrant for the arrest of the woman. In the one case for conspiracy and abduction and in the other for murder. We have enough evidence in our possession to hold her on either charge. The only question that remains to be settled is whether the man has been murdered or hypnotized and abducted."

"All right, Mr. Burr," said the young man, rising to depart. "You may expect to hear

from me some time to-morrow afternoon. Good-by."

"Good-by, my young friend. I shall await your telegram with some anxiety. I think we have at last got on the right track."

As soon as the young man was gone Thad made his arrangements to call upon Dr. Thurlow, and it just then occurred to him that he hadn't had any breakfast, although it was close on to noon; he therefore hurried out to a restaurant for that purpose.

By the time he had finished his breakfast he saw that it was too late to call at the hospital for Thurlow, for his morning hours, and he would have to wait till two; or rather, he would wait till one and start, as it would take nearly an hour to go to the hospital.

So he concluded to walk about and enjoy the fresh air while killing time.

He had gone but a little ways along Broadway when he noticed a stout, thickset man with a peculiar walk that the detective thought he recognized. He increased his pace so as to overtake the man and see his face; but when he saw the face it was not the one he expected to see. Instead of a smooth face as he expected to see, the fellow had a full beard sweeping almost to his waist. For all that, or on account of that the man could not if he desired disguise the fact of his being a Jew.

For some reason the detective wasn't satisfied that the man was any other than the one he took him for, and he decided to put in a portion of the hour and a half that he had to wait in shadowing him.

There was no difficulty about this, as even if it was the party for whom the detective took him, he in turn would not know the detective in his present disguise.

The fellow kept right on up Broadway, and the detective's course lying in that direction anyway, he kept right along only a few yards behind him.

"It cannot be possible that he is going there, even if it is he," mused Thad. "But in the first place, how can it be? for even admitting the possibility of his being alive, it isn't likely that he would exhibit himself in so public a place, where some one was sure to recognize him."

Still he pursued his course up Broadway without turning to the right or left or looking in either direction.

The detective still kept him in sight; and finally they reached Forty-second street.

And here he turned toward Eighth avenue.

"Heavens! Can it be?" thought the detective.

Still he followed the fellow, and in a few minutes more saw him stop in front of the house of Dr. Barker, and, ascending the steps, ring the bell. A moment later he was admitted.

There was but one thing to do, if he wished to ascertain the truth.

The detective also rung the bell, asked for Dr. Barker, and was admitted, and led into the little reception-room back of the doctor's consultation-room, where he was before. There was only a heavy curtain or *portiere* separating the two rooms, and the detective could hear all that was said in the consultation-room. He soon ascertained that Dr. Barker was not there, but somebody in his stead whose voice he did not recognize. The new-comer's voice he recognized at once, and pulled the *portiere* aside enough so that he could see.

The fellow had removed his long beard, and the detective now beheld the man whom he had thought at the bottom of the East River, Moses Erinstein!

CHAPTER XII.

MORE MYSTERY.

THE other man in the room with Moses the detective recognized at once from the picture Dr. Barker had shown him as Dr. Thurlow.

He could hardly restrain his enthusiasm for a moment.

Here was the man whom, above all others, he desired to meet, fallen, you might say, into his very hands.

The conversation between the two men was too low to be heard at first, but after a while they got warmed up and excited and talked louder, so that Thad was able to catch a good part of their talk.

It seemed that the doctor was severely reprimanding the other for failing to carry out some agreement, and the other was offering excuses without end for the neglect.

Finally the detective heard the doctor say:

"If what I have heard turns out to be true, I do not see how it is possible to save your neck, sir."

"But, my friend, it ain't true, I bledge you my word it ain't true. He was living this ferry minute," returned the familiar voice of Moses.

"I hope it may be so," said the doctor, with a sigh. "I do not want to be cast between the shadow of a crime which I did not commit for the second time in my life."

"Vell, der old score ish viped out for me," said Moses, with a low chuckle of satisfaction.

"How so?" asked the doctor, starting up.

"Der bapers, my friend—"

"Well?" gasped the doctor.

"Vas destroyed."

"What!" almost screeched the doctor, turning ghastly.

"Just v'at I toldt you, my friendt," returned the Jew, coolly; "you see dot voman, Sibyl Verne, got der bepers away from the detective und started over to Mother O'Roark's mit dem."

"Of course it wouldn't do for her to dake der ferry as she subbossed der vas a hal-uf a dozen bloodhounds on her drack, so v'at does she do but hired Reddy Ming to row her across."

"Vell, Reddy started ofer mit her. It vas t'ree o'clock in der morning. V'en dey vas hal-uf vay ofer Reddy noticed that she carried a dremontous pocketbook in her hands."

"Reddy's mouth vatered v'en he saw dat pocketbook, und his first t'ought vas to snatch it away, but his gallantry to der ladies ofercame der desire for monish, und he toldt her bolitely to fork ofer und he wouldn't harm a hair in her heat."

"Did she comply?" asked the doctor, excitedly.

"V'at?"

"Did she give him the pocketbook, I say?"

"Not much. She said she would die pefore she would give it up. Reddy insisted, und she resisted, und finally dey got into a regular struggle ofer it."

"Reddy ish strong as a horse, but der voman vas desbarate, und fought like a tigress. At von time it seemed as if he vas getting der pocketbook away as easy as rolling off a log, and den der voman got der upper handt, und Reddy don't got no show."

"Well, what was the result?" demanded the doctor, impatiently.

"Der result vas dat dey succeeded in upsetting der poat."

"And the woman was lost?"

"Bet yer life; und der bapers mit her," cried the Jew, triumphantly, "und dot vas a lucky stroke for Moses Erinstein, for it makes him a free man, und don't you forgit it!"

"My God!" groaned the doctor, sinking into a chair and burying his face in his hands. "I am ruined. The shadow that has hung over my life for so many years, and which I hoped was at last about to pass away, falls blacker than ever!"

"V'at's der use of vorrying, mine friendt?" said the Jew, in as near a sympathetic voice as he was capable of commanding. "Look at me! Vasn't I under a shadow all dose years as vell as your-sel-uf? You should congratulate your-sel-uf dat von of us vas to brofit by der transaction. You should feel grateful, mine friendt, dat der shadow vas removed from der life of your dearest, varnest friendt."

"You? You contemptible scoundrel!" cried the doctor, jumping to his feet. "I would have had more cause for gratitude if you had sunk in Hell Gate instead of making your escape."

"Oh, my dear—"

"There is a great deal of cause for congratulation on my part that the future of my poor child should be as much clouded as my own past has been. I cannot say that I am sorry that the woman who, in conjunction with yourself, has caused all my sorrow, is no more, if in going she had not taken the only evidence of my innocence, and my child's title to the property."

"Oh, my dear friendt, you wrong us," protested the Jew. "Ve vas as innocent as—"

"Innocent!" shouted the doctor, excitedly.

"Then who, in the name of justice and mercy, is guilty?"

"Vell, my friendt," said the Jew, in his oily voice, "der world dinks you vas der guilty barty. Myself und Sibyl Verne know better."

"Who, then, is the guilty one?"

"Who?"

"Yes, tell me, before I brain you!" roared the doctor, clutching the Jew by the throat.

"Oh, mine friendt, don't do dat!" cried the Jew; "you hurt."

"Hurt you! Curse you, I'll murder you, if you don't tell me who murdered my father, and shifted the blame upon me!" cried the excited doctor, his black eyes almost flashing fire.

The Jew was silent; and his labored breathing indicated that the doctor was clutching him pretty tightly.

"Tell me, curse you!" hissed the doctor.

"V'y, v'y—"

"Who?"

"Ainsworth," said the Jew in little more than a whisper.

"You lie!"

"I pledge you my vord—"

"Which is worth as little as any of the thousand other lies that have issued from your perjured throat!"

"But, my dear, I'm telling der truth dis time."

"But I know that you are not. Haven't I the written statement of Myra herself that he is innocent, while you and she are guilty? Haven't I her letter, written on the very night that you and she committed the crime, and that she ran away and left me with that poor helpless infant, exonerating him of all blame in the matter?"

"No, my friendt, you did have der letter, but ye don't vas got it no longer," cried the Jew in a gloating voice.

"My God! That is too true!" moaned the doctor, sinking into a chair again, and burying

his face in his hands. "The last record of my innocence and his, my best friend's, swept away; while she, whom I know to be guilty, although I have struggled so hard not to believe it, will remain innocent before the world."

"Dat vas der queerest case on record," mused, rather than uttered, the Jew. "How a man can pull der vool ofer anoder man's eyes for seventeen years, und make him belief der moon vas mate von green cheese. If I got me dat feller Ainsworth's cheek, so bellup me Moses, I would own New York py dis time."

"How can you cast any reflection upon him?" moaned Thurlow. "If he had not been the kindest, the best of men, would he have come to me, when I was compelled to leave the country and become an outcast, and take my poor child and adopt it as his own sister?"

"He vas a nice man, ain't it?" sneered the Jew.

"Would he have taken the child of a stranger and share his, at that time, scanty fortune with it, and afterward give it all the advantages of his own wealth and high standing in society, if he had not been the most noble and generous of men?"

"Oh, he vas a daisy!"

"Who but the grand, noble-hearted fellow that he was would have taken my property and held it in trust for my child, investing it so judiciously that it has increased four or five fold?"

"Und making for himself a hal'uf a million mit your monish," sneered Moses.

"That is all right; he was entitled to a profit for his trouble," said the doctor. "It would be unfair to expect a man to manipulate business without reaping some interest."

"Dat ish so; but v're, mine dear friend, does your interest come in?"

"The property, including the increase, was all made over to my daughter by Ainsworth, I understand, and the document was among the papers which you say are lost."

"You understand it vas? Vell, mine dear friend, I bet you a hal'uf a dollar against a horse-chestnut dat dere vasn't a scratch of a pen amongst dem bapers dat would gif your daughter ten cents."

"What leads you to think so?"

"I don't think so, mine friend; I know it," said the Jew, with a chuckle.

"Oh, well, there is no good in discussing the matter," cried the doctor, impatiently. "There is no way of proving it now, and I only have your word against a dead man's; one would not be believed on oath, and the other can not testify. Now, tell me: you say that Ainsworth is not dead, where is he?"

"Spirited away for der bresent," rejoined the Jew, with another low chuckle. "All in good time he vill turn up schmilging."

"What was the motive for this crime?"

"Don't ask me, mine friend; ask her. If I should venture any thery, you might d'ink I vas mixed up in der vicked transaction, und dat would injure my character."

"That would be sad," said the doctor, unable to suppress a smile. "By the way, I believe you were the head and front of the whole business, much as you try to shift it all onto Myra."

"Oh, my gracious, mine friend, the ferry idea makes me blush. V'y, my dear, I vas as innocent as a sucking-dove."

"No doubt of it," said the doctor, sarcastically. "But you haven't told me where Ainsworth is, Moses."

"He vas spirited away, I toldt you."

"I know; but where?"

"How should I know, mine friendt?"

"You do know, you scoundrel."

"I pledge you my vord—"

"Never mind making any pledges; they are of no value. Promise me one thing."

"V'at ish dot, mine friendt?"

"That you will take me to him."

"I will do dot, mine friendt."

"When?"

"Any time v'at you like."

"Say to-night."

"All right."

"It's a go then?"

"Yes, mine friendt."

"What time?"

"Any time v'at you like," said the Jew.

"How would twel-uf o'clock strike your fancy?"

"That will do. And now, I must ask you to go," said the doctor, "as I have a patient waiting in the back room for me."

"He must pe a patient on a monument to wait all dis time," laughed Moses.

"Never mind; go on."

Moses put on his long beard again and took his departure.

It was a fine point for the detective to decide for a moment, whether to follow him or remain and see the doctor.

There was little time to consider. If he intended to follow the Jew he must be after him without delay, or he would be gone. At this point he thought of the Jew's appointment with the doctor for that night, and as he could see him then he decided to meet the doctor now.

He had no more than made up his mind what he intended to do, when the old lady came in to tell him that the doctor would see him.

For a moment after coming into the doctor's presence Thad was in a quandary how to approach him.

But a moment's reflection sufficed to convince him that his only course was frankness. He could gain nothing by concealing his motive.

The doctor noticed his hesitation, brief as it was, and attributing it to the supposed illness which had brought the patient there, said:

"Pardon me for keeping you waiting so long; but if you will sit down I will attend to you at once. What appears to be the matter?"

"Pardon me, doctor," said Thad, sitting down facing Thurlow, "if I tell you that I'm afraid that my disease is beyond your power."

"I hope not, sir," said the doctor, sympathetically. "What seems—"

"To be frank with you, doctor, and to come to the point at once," interrupted the detective, "I am the doctor in this case, and have come to treat you. In short, sir, I am a detective, working upon the case of your friend Ainsworth, who is supposed to be murdered."

The doctor turned pale.

"Tell me: is he dead?" he gasped at last.

"That is as much of a mystery to me at present as it is to yourself. I imagine from two sources of information, however, that he is not."

"What were these sources, may I ask?"

"One was the assertion of the Jew who has just left you, and the other is your own letter."

"My own letter? What do you mean?"

"The letter you wrote Sibyl Verne, or Myra, giving advice in the matter of the taking off of your friend."

"You astonish me, sir," he cried, growing terribly agitated.

"Do you mean to say that you never wrote her a letter upon the subject?"

"Most certainly I do," exclaimed the doctor, firmly. "What—"

"Do you deny the authorship of that letter, sir?" demanded Thad, showing him the epistle.

The doctor took the letter with trembling fingers, and merely glanced at it, when he said:

"I never saw it before, sir. I have not acquainted myself with its contents, but anybody that knows me will tell you that that is not my writing."

There was an earnestness in the expression as well as an honesty in the face that carried conviction with them, and Thad was satisfied at once.

"I believe you, sir," said he, after a moment's study of the doctor's face. "If I had not overheard your conversation with the Jew, which satisfied me that you were an honest man, your words and face would have done so now. Now, doctor, having been convinced that you have had no hand in this villainous affair, although I at first suspected you, I want to ask your co-operation in discovering the real culprit. Two days ago I was sure that I had the most complete clew to the perpetrators that could be imagined. To-day I find that I am as far off as when I started."

"Sir, I shall take pleasure in doing all in my power to assist you," said the doctor, earnestly. "You can have no greater interest in finding the murderers or abductors of my friend than myself. You may rely upon me."

"Thank you," said Thad, warmly, taking his hand. "I feel that I can trust you. Now, doctor, first of all, tell me, if you can, who wrote that letter. Who is 'A'?"

The doctor took the letter and examined it carefully for a moment, and the color left his face.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible that that woman has sunk to this depth of depravity? Alas! it is too true. Although addressed to herself, it was written by Sibyl Verne, otherwise Myra Thurlow, my wife!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A SAD STORY.

THE silence into which Dr. Thurlow subsided was so evidently the result of deep and poignant grief, that the detective did not dare to disturb him.

After a little the doctor rallied of his own accord, and said:

"This is ridiculous. Why should I give a moment's thought to this woman, who has caused me so much sorrow and trouble? I should, and henceforward will, cast her from me like the loathsome thing that she is."

"May she not have been misled by others, doctor?" suggested Thad.

"No. I wish to God I could find that she had! For seventeen years she has continually persecuted my friend Ainsworth and myself, and in that time she has been guilty of the most heinous crimes; and I have always striven to discover some excuse, some extenuating circumstance in her favor; but have never been able to discover any. I am at last convinced that she is thoroughly bad, thoroughly depraved."

"You believe, then, that your wife is at the bottom of all this business, murder or kidnapping, conspiracy and all?"

"I do."

"You believe her to be fully capable of it, do you?"

"Believe it? I know it!" cried the doctor, in

a broken voice, that showed what pain it had cost him to say that.

"And yet she was not always that way?"

"What do you mean?"

"When she was a young girl, when you were first married, for instance."

"Why do you recall those happy days?" groaned the doctor. "Would to God I could forget how good, how beautiful she was at that time, and then it would not break my heart to know how bad she is now. Look at this," he went on, leading the detective through the *portieres* into the next room, and in front of the picture which had caused Thad such a thrill the day previous; "look at that," said the doctor. "Would you not say that that was the picture of an angel?"

"A very beautiful, gentle and virtuous woman, at all events," said Thad.

"And yet to realize—to know what she really is—the thought is maddening. Oh, that I could tear her image from my heart!"

"Pardon me, doctor," said Thad, kindly, laying his hand upon Thurlow's shoulder, "pardon me if I tell you that I believe you are wronging this woman, that she is more sinned against than sinning, that your efforts to obliterate her image from your memory, are all wrong. Pardon me if I tell you that the day will come when you will know she is an innocent woman, and you will be happily reunited."

"Never—" The doctor paused and looked the detective in the face for a full minute as he might have looked upon a miracle.

At length he said, in low, measured tones:

"What are you—man or spirit—that come to me with a prophecy that would be the fulfillment of the dream, the hope, the prayers of seventeen long years?"

Thad took his proffered hand and pressed it warmly, at the same time indulging in a little good-natured laugh.

"Man, I believe," he said. "At least those who have had occasion to test me have generally acknowledged as much, in a muscular sense at all events. And, so far as the prophecy is concerned, it is merely in a line with a theory which my experiences for the past few days have forced upon me. It may not develop as I believe and trust; but it shall be the happiest day of my life if I can bring about its consummation."

"The happiest day of your life, my friend?" cried the doctor, grasping Thad's hand again, his usually pale, melancholy face flushed with hope and its attendant joy. "My God!" he cried, all of a sudden, "what am I saying? What false hopes am I borrowing from your enthusiasm? It can never be! It can never be!" he cried, his face assuming a look of mingled sorrow and sadness.

"Never be?" cried the detective. "Why not?"

"She is no more. She is dead!"

"I don't believe a word of it," declared Thad, stoutly. "I wouldn't believe that scoundrelly Moses in any event; but in this case I am satisfied that it is only a part of the grand conspiracy which I believe to be on foot, which I will expose and air before you are a month older, Doctor Thurlow, and you will be astonished to find who is at the head of it."

"Then—then you think there is hope?"

"I know it."

"I will hope, then," he said in a more cheerful voice, taking the detective's arm and conducting him into the other room again. And if you do succeed in bringing about what you speak of," he said, turning and facing Thad, "you will find the warmest friend in me you ever had."

"Thank you, doctor, I believe that," said Thad, warmly. "But let us sit down; I want to speak to you upon another matter."

They sat down, and the detective became thoughtful for a moment. Finally he said:

"Doctor Thurlow, I have received intimations from various sources that you had had some trouble several years ago; that, in short, you were accused of a heinous crime, which, however, they did not succeed in convicting you of. Would you mind telling me your version of the story—which, indeed, I shall believe to be the correct one?"

The expression of intense pain that passed over the doctor's face caused the detective to almost wish he hadn't made the request; and indeed, if it had not been necessary for the furtherance of his case, he would have been inclined to withdraw it.

After a moment of silence, during which Thad could see that a terrible struggle was going on in the man's breast, he said, in a low, husky voice:

"You do not know, sir, what you are asking—I am sure you do not, or the request would never have been made; your kind heart would never have permitted it."

"I do realize the probable agony that it will cost you, my friend," said Thad; "and if I was permitted to allow my heart to dictate my course, you would never be called upon to again go over a portion of your life's road which will doubtless be like walking upon pointed spikes. Unfortunately, my professional duty sometimes compels me to steel my heart against feeling

and sentiment. In this case, it is absolutely necessary for me to know this story in order to complete my theory upon which to work."

"Very well, Mr. Burr, you shall have the story, painful as the recital is to me; for I am satisfied that you are honestly endeavoring to unravel this horrid mystery, and as I promised you before, I will do all in my power to assist you."

"I thank you," said Thad warmly, "your faith in me shall never be shaken by any act of mine."

After another painful silence, the doctor began:

"Nineteen years ago I was married to Myra Montagu, the beautiful woman whose picture you saw in there, in Cleveland, Ohio."

"Pardon me," interrupted Thad; "a sister of the weak-minded young man whom I have seen about the Parkinsons?"

"No; a cousin. I will explain that after a little," replied Thurlow. "As I said before, and as her picture shows, she was one of the sweetest and noblest, as well as the most beautiful of women. I was a young man then, full of hope and energy. I was poor; but I had a splendid practice and was gradually amassing a comfortable fortune, at the same time enjoying all the luxuries we cared for."

"It is needless to tell you that we were very happy. Life was a veritable dream then. My beautiful wife rendered the modest but comfortable little home which I was able to provide, a perfect little paradise, and I constantly looked forward when I was absent from home to the bright scene of my little home and the loving greeting I should receive from my wife."

"Matters went on thus happily for two years, and then, as if the gods were jealous of our happiness, there came a change—a sudden, chilling plunge into the very depths of misery."

"My father, who had been absent for many years, traveling in foreign countries, and whom we believed to be dead as we had not heard from him for so long, suddenly and unexpectedly to everybody, returned home."

"It seems that the first place he went, after learning the address, was my office, which was located a block away from my house."

"Whom he met there nobody knows or probably ever will know. I was away in another part of the town visiting a patient who was momentarily expected to die."

"And now I want to tell you something right here, before going any further, which I have never told to mortal man, and I only tell you that you may understand the sudden and unaccountable transition of this woman from an angel to a fiend. I tell you, because you should know that her conversion to vice and crime was not the result of gradual schooling under the tutelage of a cunning betrayer, but a sudden plunge and of her own free will. Here is what I wanted to tell you: I left the office at about six o'clock. She had come down to the office a few minutes before that time to tell me to come home to supper, and bringing the baby, little Bettie, with her. This was her common habit in fine weather, when she knew I was in, and then I would have a romp with the baby and after take her upon my shoulder and carry her home."

"On the evening in question Myra seemed to me more beautiful and affectionate than ever, and it seemed as though I could never get done pressing her to my heart and kissing her."

"Well, as I say, after a romp with the baby, we started home; but almost on the threshold I was met by a messenger calling me to the side of the dying patient. I could do nothing else but go, of course, even had it been my desire. I had a momentary pang, to be sure, when I bade my wife good-by, and told her to go on home, and that I would soon be there. Little did I dream then, my friend, what that return home was to mean. My picture of anticipated happiness—but I anticipate."

"While I was away, perhaps an hour after I had gone, my father came into the office—I never locked the place, as there was nothing to steal, besides leaving it unlocked made it convenient for patients to go in and wait for me when I was out. As I say, nobody knows whom he met there. All that is positively known is, that he was discovered a few moments later—dead!"

"Who discovered him?" asked Thad.

"My friend Morton Ainsworth."

"I could have sworn to it."

"Why?" asked Thurlow, in surprise.

"Never mind, it is a part of my theory. Was anybody with your friend when he discovered the body of your murdered father?"

"Yes; this same Moses Earnstein."

"Tally again."

"What do you mean?"

"I know it was as you say."

"How did you know it?" demanded Thurlow, a little testily. "Who told you?"

"Nobody, directly," replied Thad. "It is the result of a theory pieced up from various bits from various sources. But go on with your story."

"There is not much more to tell, but—" here he paused and wiped his eyes—"it is the cruellest part of it."

"I returned home as soon as I could leave my patient, that is as soon as she had passed away, which was near midnight.

"With a pang in my heart for having been compelled to keep my poor wife waiting so long, I hurried home.

"As I crossed the little yard, with its pretty flower-beds that she and I had made together, I glanced toward the house, and was delighted to see a bright light in the little parlor, which I knew was only the beacon of the real welcome that I should receive later.

"I ran rather than walked the rest of the way, and crossed the little porch at a stride. My knock at the door was the result of my playfulness, as I might have gone in, the door seldom being locked, and I wanted to surprise her.

"I still recall the pang of apprehension I felt when she did not respond at once, and which a moment later I hated myself for having allowed myself to feel. But when I had repeated the knock two or three times, I concluded that she had lain down and gone to sleep, so I opened the door and went in.

"The baby was asleep in her crib, and everything was in its place as though nothing was out of the way.

"Supposing that she was of course in another room, either hiding to play a trick upon me or asleep, I darted from one room to another in search of her.

"Not finding her in any of the rooms, I was at first a little apprehensive. Who would not be that loved his wife to madness? Still I thought she must be at some of the neighbors', and sat down at a table—the table where night after night I was in the habit of reading to her. I began to read the paper, and for a long time lulled my mind to repose with the news of the day. Finally, however, I began to wonder why she did not return, and began to grow nervous.

"At last I could stand it no longer, and dropping the paper, made up my mind that I would find out where she was. I ran over in my mind the list of neighbors she was in the habit of visiting, and decided upon the one she would be most likely to visit. Just then my eye fell upon a note, addressed to myself in her well-known handwriting.

"A dull pain shot to my heart at sight of it—a pain which has remained to this day. But I picked it up with nervous fingers, and read as follows:

"DEAR AMOS:—

"Forgive me for this, the first foolish, I might say criminal, act of my life. When you read this, I will be far away, with a man you least suspect.

"Whatever may come to light in the future, remember this: that *he* was in nowise to blame. The fact is, I could not conscientiously live with a murderer, as I have this moment discovered you to be, nor could I consent to live with a man whom I did not love.

"The man with whom I go is no more responsible for this act than any other man who is lured to ruin (if you wish to call it that), by a designing woman.

"Take good care of our baby, as well for the love we once imagined we entertained for each other as your own paternal affection.

"Your own erring wife.

"MYRA.

"An hour later I was arrested for murder, and laid in jail until my trial took place.

"I had no trouble in proving an *alibi*, and was acquitted before the courts; but the mass of the people believe me guilty, and believe so to this day. The result was that I had to leave Cleveland and seek new quarters. But the worst of it was, no matter where I went the tale of my disgrace followed me. Look at me to-day. Instead of occupying the position that my medical skill entitles me to, I must do the dirty work of a clandestine specialist, work which my pride naturally rebels against."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED "FIND."

A LONG silence followed this story of the doctor, and as it did not look as though he was likely to resume the story again, the detective revived the conversation.

"Have you no idea with whom she eloped?" said he, "for I suppose that of course she eloped with some one."

"Yes, I had my suspicions; and although they have never been verified, I still have them."

"And whom did and do you suspect?"

"Can you imagine?"

"Yes, Ainsworth."

"There is where you are wrong for once. It was none other than her cousin, Montagu, the fellow they call The Owl."

"Why did you suspect him?"

"For several reasons. In the first-place, they were devoted to each other, and in the second place, he disappeared shortly after. You see, he was studying medicine under me at the time."

"Was he then the imbecile he is now?" asked Thad.

"No, at that time he was quite a bright and promising young man."

"Did you never see him afterward?"

"Yes, he was the first one to give me the

news of my wife's elopement with another man, he said—a blind, no doubt, to cover up his own sin."

"Who did he say the party was?"

"Ainsworth, of course. Every one respected him, for some reason or other."

"Rightfully, too, no doubt," said Thad.

"Nothing of the kind," declared Thurlow, indignantly.

"Didn't he also disappear about that time?"

"He did; but he satisfied me in regard to his whereabouts, and the cause of his going, a short time afterward."

"No doubt."

"And to prove his friendship in that my hour of tribulation, he took my baby, adopted it, and has proven a father to it ever since."

"He also took possession of your property, didn't he?"

"Yes, at my request."

"Has he ever returned it, or any part of it, or the profits from it?"

"N-no," stammered Thurlow, for he hated to admit any wrong of his friend. "No, he hasn't; but he has it well invested, so that it has greatly increased in value, and has it all bequeathed in a will to my daughter."

"Pardon me, Doctor Thurlow; but I cannot help echoing the sentiment of the Jew that just left you, when he said that this man had pulled the wool over your eyes."

"Do you believe, then," cried Thurlow, bridling up, "that my friend has deceived me?"

"I am sorry to say that I do," said Thad.

"But let us drop that for the time. I overheard you make an appointment with the Jew to go in search of Ainsworth."

"Moses promised to take me to him to-night?"

"Just so. Now, see here, doctor; would you have any objection to my going, also?"

Thurlow reflected a little while, and then said:

"What is your motive in wishing to go with us?"

"I desire to see Ainsworth, if he is living."

"For what object? You do not suspect my friend of any crime, do you?"

"Whether I do or not has nothing to do with it," said Thad; "and my motive in wishing to go must for the present remain a secret. I may as well tell you that I will go in any event, whether you will it or not; but I would much rather go with your consent."

"How would it be possible for you to accompany us against my will, Mr. Burr. I am curious to know."

"We detectives have a way, Doctor Thurlow, of inflicting our company upon that of others not only without their consent, but without their knowledge. This is easily accomplished; but, as I said, I prefer in this instance to go with you."

"Very well, sir, you shall," said the doctor at last. "Will you go with your natural appearance, as you are now, or in disguise?"

Thad laughed at the idea of calling his present make-up his natural appearance, but did not consider it worth while to enlighten the doctor.

"I shall go in disguise," said he, "made up as a doctor, and I want you to introduce me as a colleague of yours."

Thurlow looked at him in surprise for a moment, and then shook his head and laughed.

"You detectives are a queer lot," he said, "and your ways are as mysterious as Providence. You shall go, sir, as my colleague. Be here by eleven o'clock. I am anxious to see the outcome of this business. Will I recognize you when you arrive, do you suppose?"

"I presume not," replied Thad, "and it will therefore be necessary to have some kind of pass-word—'Medicus,' for instance."

"Very well," said Thurlow; "when I hear the word 'Medicus,' I shall know whom I am dealing with."

"And now I must take my leave," said Thad, "as I have considerable to do this afternoon. Good-by for the present."

"Good-by, sir."

As soon as the detective left Thurlow he went directly to the office of the Russian chemist, Dodorov.

The little chemist did not know him in his disguise, but a word was sufficient to satisfy him who the detective was.

"Well, Mistaire Burr, what have we now?" was the first question after he had ascertained to whom he was talking.

"Another poison," said Burr, handing him the paper containing the powder which Cockerall had gathered up in the cemetery.

"Aha, aha!" cried the little chemist. "More poisoning, eh?"

"No; same case," rejoined Thad. "What I want to know is, whether that is the same as the compound which you found in the rosebud I brought you."

"Aha, aha; clinching ze evidence, eh? If zis eez ze same as ze ozzair, zen you have him on ze nip, eh?"

"I don't know about that. I am anxious to prove that this powder and the other are the same. Nevertheless, it may turn out after all that no poison was used."

"What? Zen what you prove?" said the Russian, placing the powder under the microscope.

"That both are from the same hand, that is, manufacturer."

"I see," said Dodorov; "but what eez ze good of zat if you do not prove zat ze dead man—"

"I am not sure yet that there is a dead man; in fact, I expect to show in the course of time that no murder has been committed."

"Ohol! Zis is good!" cried the little chemist, laughing. "Zen you will present to ze world ze novel spectacle of a murder case wizout ze murder; eh, Mistaire Burr?"

"That, I believe and hope, will be the outcome," said Thad.

Dodorov was silent, except for a sort of purring sound which he made with his mouth, and which he continually kept up when he was deeply absorbed in anything.

Finally, after a long and careful examination, the detective noticed that a peculiar light came into his face, which indicated that he had made a discovery.

"Well?" said Thad.

"Well, it eez ze same," returned the chemist, "except zat ze compound found in ze flower had been etherized, and was zarefore harmless, while zis is still potent, ready, when combined wiz a strong perfume, to work death and destruction upon mankind, or any ozzair animal for ze matter of zat. Hold, I will show you somesing," he said, jumping up and running into the next room, from which he emerged a moment later with a mouse in a trap. The mouse was unharmed and extremely lively. "Now you shall see," continued the chemist, putting the cage on the edge of the table, "what ze ingenious mind of wicked man is capable of."

He then took a silk handkerchief, and, after saturating a corner of it with oil of bergamot, sprinkled a few grains of the powder upon it, and taking good care to keep it away from his own nostrils, placed it against the side of the cage. A second later the mouse, in its efforts to find a means of escape, dodged over to the side of the cage, and naturally inhaled the perfume. Instantly the creature dropped dead.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the detective.

But he was more surprised when he saw the chemist, a moment later, raise the handkerchief to his own nose and inhale the perfume.

The expression of horror and apprehension that came into Thad's face at sight of this action caused the little Russian to laugh.

"Do not be alarmed, Mistaire Burr," he said, "Ze compound is as harmless now as chalk. It is only during vaporization zat it is deadly, and zis only lasts a few seconds at most."

"That would be delightful stuff to put upon a sweetheart's handkerchief," said Thad, laughing.

"Yes, if you desired to rid yourself of ze sweetheart, which is hardly supposable," said Dodorov. "A wife zat a rascally husband was tired of would be a more likely victim."

The chemist then made out a certificate of analysis, after receiving which Thad returned to his studio.

Scarcely had he arrived when a messenger-boy brought him a telegram.

It was from Cockerall, and simply contained the word "Exchanged."

"As I expected," mused the detective, "and now I will go at once and procure a bench warrant for the woman's arrest, although I haven't the least idea now that we can hold her from the turn matters have taken."

He hurried away, procured the warrant and returned to his room, stopping on his way to get his dinner, however.

As he had plenty of time, he went leisurely to work making himself up as a profound and dignified-looking doctor, with flowing beard, sprinkled with gray, and professional-looking spectacles.

When he had finally completed his task, it occurred to him to attend to a matter that he had been neglecting for a long time, which was, rendering his retreat more secure against intrusion from outsiders.

The secret passage leading from the street, which, it will be remembered, was on Thirteenth street to Fourteenth, had been the means of entrance employed by the woman, Sibyl Verne, and he was desirous of preventing a second similar surprise.

The door leading into the passage was reached by an ordinary lock, which was, of course, no security against a person of her cunning and adaptability; so he took a chain which he found among his store of curiosities, and after driving a staple into the jamb on each side, put the chain through them, drew it across the door, and secured it with a large padlock.

For some reason or other, after he had secured the door and turned away, he decided to go back and search the corridor leading to the secret stairway.

"If this woman is alive," he said to himself, "and I believe she is, this warrant is of no account unless she is found; and who knows but that in making her escape through the passage she may have dropped something that will lead to her discovery?"

With this idea in his head the detective took his dark-lantern and proceeded into the corridor.

The light of the lantern, flashed into every

nook and corner, revealed nothing in the corridor, beyond dust and mildew, and he pushed on further.

"What," he mused, "if I should run upon the papers? This would indeed be a streak of luck!"

But the mention of the papers set him to reflecting.

What, after all, if the Jew had told the truth about the woman being drowned, and carrying those papers with her to the bottom of the river? This would upset everything.

Without the woman and the papers, very little could be accomplished.

True, he might prove that there had been a conspiracy, but that was already pretty well established by the letter purporting to come from Thurlow, but which had, according to Thurlow, been written by his wife; but without the woman herself, this was valueless.

With these reflections, he made his way along the damp, dingy corridor until he came to the steps.

Here he paused for a moment and cast the glow of his lamp down the stairway.

This was a precaution the detective always took before descending—at least ever since an occasion when he had been waylaid at this point by a would-be murderer.

After satisfying himself that nobody was concealed along the stairway, the detective proceeded to descend, flashing his light here and there into every conceivable corner and crevice as he went along.

In this way he reached the bottom of the steps without discovering anything.

The stairs were of wood, roughly knocked together, with no other idea than that of utility, and had no back to them; so that anything dropped by a person going up or down would be as apt as not to fall through between the steps to the ground behind them.

Thad thought of this as he was going down, and when he reached the bottom he flashed his light through the space between two of the steps, so that it illuminated the space behind or under the stairs.

There was a mass of old papers scattered about on the ground, and these he raked out as far as he could reach with his cane, and looked them over carefully, but found nothing of interest or value.

Concluding that there was nothing under there worth searching for, the detective continued his walk along the tunnel leading to Fourteenth street, searching every portion of it as he went along.

Thus he reached the end, or door leading into the basement of the house on Fourteenth street, and concluding that it was not worth his while to go any further, retraced his steps.

On reaching the foot of the stairs again, the detective instinctively flashed his lantern once more through one of the openings.

He had no more than done so, when he saw something flash back the reflection of the lamp like a bright piece of tin or silver.

At first he thought it was only an empty fruit-can or some similarly worthless object, and was about to pass on, when for some reason his mind reverted to the box of powder which Cockerall had seen in the woman's hands in the cemetery.

With the vaguest kind of an idea that it might possibly be this that he had seen, Thad reached under with his cane and hauled the object out.

To his utter surprise it was a silver box, about the size of, and similar in shape to a snuff-box.

He did not pause to open it there, but hurried up-stairs and into his front room.

It had grown dark by this time, and he lighted his student lamp on the table, and sat down to examine the box at his leisure.

There was nothing peculiar about the outside, further than being rather handsomely engraved, and the detective raised the lid, holding the box at a distance from him. It was about half-full of a grayish-white powder.

"More work for the chemist," he mused.

Just then he noticed that there was a name engraved on the inside of the lid. The silver was so tarnished that he could not make it out at first, but when he placed it under a microscope it was quite clear.

The name was: *Morton Ainsworth!*

CHAPTER XV.

"MR. ROGERS."

THAD'S surprise can hardly be imagined at finding the name of Ainsworth.

Somehow he had conceived the idea that Ainsworth was a pretty bad man, in spite of his pretensions to morality and the commendations of his devoted friend Thurlow; but to find his name on this box of subtle poison rather stumped the detective.

Still he thought, after mature deliberation, that this artful woman might easily have come in possession of the box by fraudulent means; or so far as that was concerned, inasmuch as she had written a letter and forged her husband's initial to it, what was there to hinder her

from having the name Morton Ainsworth engraved upon the box-lid for the purpose of carrying out some scheme?

If he had entertained a particle of sympathy for the woman before, it was all gone now.

It might be that she had been deeply wronged, as she had said, and it might be that Ainsworth was a great sinner.

But here was something appalling in the way of crime.

Even supposing that Ainsworth had owned the box; even supposing that he had put that poison into it, he was hardly as bad as the woman who carried it about, doling its contents out to innocent people.

While he was thinking the matter over, his eyes wandered about the room, and at last fell upon the face of the clock, and he saw that it only wanted a few minutes of eleven.

He sprang to his feet at once.

He would have but a few minutes to reach Thurlow's office, if he wished to be there at eleven; and if he was not there at that time, the chances were that Thurlow and the Jew would be gone, and his scheme of meeting Ainsworth would be knocked in the head.

The detective, therefore, hastened to take his departure, and a few minutes later rung the bell of Dr. Barker on Forty-second street.

To the attendant, who happened to be Thurlow, who was expecting him, he whispered the word "Medicus," and was at once admitted and conducted into the consultation room.

"Moses has not yet arrived," he said, "and we will have a little time to talk before he comes. Since I saw you this afternoon I have made a discovery, which has in a measure changed my opinion of my life-long friend (as I supposed), Ainsworth."

"You don't say," said Thad, who expected to hear him make some startling revelation in regard to the supposed murdered man that would revolutionize and upset all of his former theories.

"Yes," said Thurlow, "I have discovered from pretty good authority that Ainsworth was a speculator and a gambler, and that at the very time of his supposed death he was pressed for money to pay his gambling debts."

"Where do you get your information?" asked Thad.

"The man is stopping at the Barrett House. Here is his card. I shall not attempt to explain any further. In fact, I did not inquire much further; but, getting his card, and telling him that a friend of mine—a lawyer—for he came to me as the friend of Ainsworth to settle his bill—would call upon him, I gave him the slip. Now, I want you to get yourself up as a first-class shyster lawyer to-morrow, and call upon this fellow and see what he has to say, Burr. You may get some good pointers from him. Keep the card."

"All right; much obliged," said Thad. "I shall lose no time in seeing him. But here comes our Hebrew friend."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before the Jew strolled into the room with his usual calmness and sang *froid*.

"How you do, shendlemens?" he said, tipping his high hat, but not removing it.

"Are you ready to go, Moses?" asked Thurlow, in a cold, practical tone.

"You bet," was the rather forcible than elegant reply.

"Come on, then," said the doctor, rather gruffly.

"V'at's der matter, mine friendt? Vas you got a bug on?"

The doctor made no reply to this, and allowing the Jew to take the lead, dropped back with Thad.

"Now," said he, "it will be necessary for you to adopt some name by which to be introduced to Ainsworth."

"Yes; call me Doctor Jackson," said Thad.

"That is an easy name to remember."

"Very well; and now—"

"It vas batter offer we takes a hack, ain't it?" said Moses, stopping suddenly when they reached Broadway.

"Yes, that will be the better way, if we have far to go," said Thad. "Call one."

"You see," said Moses, after returning from across the street where he had called a hack, "I don't mind it so much for myself, for I'm used to it; but you shendlemen's reputations might suffer from being seen together."

"That will do, Moses," cried the doctor, sternly. And then turning to Thad, "You mustn't mind this fellow, Doctor Jackson. He's a rattle-brain, as you can see."

"I guess Doctor Jackson vas cracked harder nuts dan I vas," said Moses, with a knowing wink at the detective.

This was a surprise to Thad. Could it be possible that the cunning fellow recognized him in spite of his disguise? It looked like it, and yet how was such a thing possible? At all events, thought he, it will be as well to keep an eye on him.

The hack having got turned round, drove up at this moment, and the three men got in.

Conversation was naturally pretty well suspended now, as Thad and the doctor did not care to discuss anything in presence of the Jew. As

for the latter, he kept up a continuous chatter about anything and everything, but the others paid no attention to him.

Finally, after a ride of over an hour, the doctor said:

"See here, Moses, how much further is it?"

"Oh, my gracious, mine friendt," exclaimed the Jew, "ve vasn't stardted yet. It vill be nearly morning before ve vas dare."

"Why didn't you say so before we started?" demanded the doctor, angrily.

"V'at for?"

"We might, in that case, have taken some other conveyance, a more rapid one."

"My dear, v'y didn't you say you wanted ter go fast instead of quviett? Did you dink der shendlemans lifed shust agross der streedt?"

The doctor saw that it was folly to multiply words with this parrot, and so swallowed his anger.

The Jew's reputation for lying was borne out on this occasion, for although he said they had hardly started and would be all night on the road, scarcely half an hour more elapsed when the hack stopped and Moses said:

"Vell, shendlemen's, ve vas dere, except a few minutes' valk."

When they got out of the hack the doctor and the detective were surprised to find themselves in one of the loneliest and wildest spots among the Westchester hills. The hack had driven as far up into a narrow gorge as it could go; and, in fact, a few yards beyond the horses' heads the pathway grew so narrow that there was barely room for a single person to pass. It was very dark.

"It's better if you vas quviett, now," whispered Moses. "Don't talk, for ve can't most always tell v'at vas in der vind."

With that he started along the narrow defile and the others followed him.

This road continued for a hundred yards or more, and then, notwithstanding the general darkness, it became apparent to the detective and doctor that they had entered a subterranean passage of some kind. This continued for some distance, and then suddenly they could tell by the change in the atmosphere that they were in the open air again. While in the tunnel the air was heavy and damp, while now it was light and dry and bore the fragrance of forest leaves.

All this time not a word had been spoken.

The Jew trudged on in his peculiar swinging gait, neither looking to the right or to the left, and what was a novel thing for him to do, never once speaking.

At last they came upon a little rise in the ground and Thad could see the dim outline of a low building between him and the sky.

"Now," said Moses, "ve must make some kind of exguse for coming here, and you shendlemens must bear der plame, for if dot teller knowed I vas brought you, dere would be a dead Sheeny in a hal-uf a minute."

"All right, Moses, we will tell him that learning accidentally that he was ill, we had compelled you to lead us to him," said the doctor.

"Or, what is better still," suggested Thad, "he needn't know that Moses brought us here at all. He can show us the way and we can go on, leaving him behind."

"Dat ish all perry fine, mine friendt," said Moses; "der only drouble ish you couldn't get in withoudt me."

"How is that?" asked the doctor.

"Der pass-vord."

"Can't you give it to us?"

"Oh, mine gracious, mine friends! Do you vant me gilled?"

"I'm not very particular," said the doctor, "why?"

"Idt would be surer death dan rough on rattlesnakes for dat man ter know dat I vas gif it away der bass-word."

"All right, then; you go on, and we'll follow. When we are in the presence of my friend—of Ains—"

"Don't bronnounce dat name here, mine friend, if you value my life, as well as your own," pleaded Moses, in a frightened voice.

"What's his name here?" asked the doctor in surprise, for he still retained a good deal of confidence in his old idol, and could not realize how he could be guilty of anything so heinous as that of changing his name.

"His name here vas Rogers," replied Moses. "Vasn't dat a nice, smooth name?"

"Very well," said the doctor, "when we get into his presence we can explain matters satisfactorily, I guess. Lead on."

Without another word the Jew led the way again, this time in the direction of the house.

A few steps brought them to a sort of covered passage or vestibule, and Moses tapped three times upon the door leading into it.

After a long wait somebody opened the door about an inch, and Moses whispered something, after which the door was opened wide enough to admit him and he stepped in.

Whoever was at the door was about to close it again, when Moses protested, and then followed an animated whispered conversation, at the end of which the party at the door put his head outside and told them to come in.

The sight of the person's face caused Thad to start involuntarily.

And no wonder. The face was that of The Owl.

When they got inside the idiot stopped to explain to them that Mr. Rogers (he evidently imagined they were ignorant of Ainsworth's real identity) had retired, but would rise and soon be ready to receive them.

There was no light in the small apartment into which they had been ushered except a small lamp with a translucent chimney, similar to those used in sick-rooms; but it was sufficient for the detective to discern the idiot's features with tolerable distinctness, and he was surprised to notice the utter absence of the imbecile expression which he had thought peculiar to it. The eyes, too, although as large and colorless as ever, appeared to have a good deal of intelligence and penetration in them.

This was very puzzling.

Could it be possible, then, that this fellow's imbecility was assumed for a purpose?

Verily, thought Thad, this case would never cease yielding new mysteries and new complications.

But the detective's greatest surprise was yet to come.

The Owl had said that "Rogers" would be ready to receive them in a few minutes, and as a consequence they momentarily expected the arrival of some one to announce his readiness.

At last the messenger came.

It was a bent old woman, whom, in spite of her disguise, Thad at once recognized as Sibyl Verne!

He did not betray the fact that he knew her, however, and he was satisfied that Thurlow did not recognize her.

She announced in a thin, nasal voice, which Thad knew was assumed, that Mr. Rogers would now see them.

She then conducted them into another room, where the doctor, at least, was surprised to find an old man, with long white locks and snowy beard that swept to his waist, reclining in an easy-chair, and dressed in a smoking-gown.

Thurlow turned to the woman for an explanation, and she simply said:

"Mr. Rogers, gentlemen."

After which she left the room.

As soon as he could overcome his surprise the doctor advanced and extended his hand.

The other grasped it warmly, and exclaimed in a broken voice:

"It was so kind of you, my dear old friend, to come to me in this my hour of greatest tribulation."

He then pulled the doctor's head down and whispered something in his ear, which Thad understood referred to himself, for the next instant the doctor turned toward him and said:

"Mr. Rogers, this is my friend and colleague, Doctor Jackson."

At this Ainsworth merely nodded his head, and as he showed no inclination to shake hands or to continue the acquaintance any further, Thad contented himself with sinking into a large cushioned chair and listening.

"What does it all mean, anyway?" asked Thurlow with more skepticism in his tone than Thad could have imagined.

"Mean?" said the other in a whining voice. "How can you ask? Don't you see that I am a prisoner here?"

"A prisoner?"

"Yes. I dare not stir beyond the confines of this house, jail or whatever it is."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Thurlow in surprise. "Don't you know where you are?"

"I have not the remotest idea."

"Why do you wear this disguise?"

"Sh-s-sh!" he cried, holding up a finger and glancing toward the door. "The old woman! She is the same one that wanted to poison me; but they persuaded her finally to only hypnotize me, so that they could abduct me. She thinks now, however, that the powder in the bouquet did actually kill me, and I am obliged to wear this disguise to prevent her from recognizing me; for if she did she would kill me."

"I am very sorry for this, my old friend," said Thurlow, who was by this time convinced that he had deeply wronged his friend in believing any harm of him. "What can I do for you?"

"Get me out of this," whined Ainsworth. "For God's sake, for the sake of our old friendship, rescue me from the hands of these wretches! You can do it, I know you can. You know the way to this place, and can steal me away; but you will have to be cautious, and both of our lives will have to be risked in the enterprise."

"It matters not," cried Thurlow, enthusiastically; "I will rescue you, if I lose my life by it!"

"Oh, thank you!" cried Ainsworth, passionately. "I can never repay you for your kind devotion. When shall it be?"

"To-night, if you say so."

"To-night let it be, then."

CHAPTER XVI. THE RESCUE.

DR. THURLOW was silent for some minutes, deeply involved in thought.

He was considering the best method for carrying out the proposed rescue.

Meanwhile the detective, who had taken no part in the affair, watched and listened, with a rather amused countenance, and wondering what would be the outcome of it.

Thad was puzzled, nevertheless, to understand the situation, as, indeed, anybody would have been.

If Ainsworth was really a prisoner, as he claimed to be, it seemed strange that these people should show him the deference they did.

On the other hand, what could be the man's motive for being there as he was, pretending to be a prisoner to those who knew of the affair, and supposed by the rest of the world to be in his grave.

Thad also wondered if he knew that the body buried as his had been taken up and found to be that of some one else.

While these reflections were passing through his mind, Ainsworth resumed the conversation with Thurlow.

"Well, my friend," he said, "have you formulated any plan for my delivery?"

"Not quite," replied the doctor. "I have considered several, but none of them seem practicable."

"What appears to be the trouble?" inquired Ainsworth.

"The main trouble will arise, I fear, in getting you out of the house, and then—" he paused.

"Have you any idea, my friend, of the difficulties attending the approach to this place?" he finally asked.

"Not the slightest, friend Thurlow; for, as I told you, or should have told you, I was brought here with my eyes shut."

"Well, I came with my eyes open," said the doctor, "but I might just as well have had them shut so far as any good they were to me, and I fear I shall want a couple of pairs of eyes to find my way out again."

"The place is really so inaccessible, then?"

"Yes, so much so that I fear we shall have great difficulty in finding our way out at night. If we could get away from the house without being noticed, and hide some place till daylight, there would be much less trouble."

"That I am afraid cannot be done," said Ainsworth reflectively. "Still, if you are willing to make the trial I am with you. My idea of the best plan is, for me to retire and you gentlemen may do the same. In a few minutes you will find the house buried in slumber, and then will be the time to work."

"There will hardly be time for this, will there?" said Thurlow. "It only wants two hours of daylight now."

"That is all the better," said Ainsworth.

"One hour will suffice for the guards to get thoroughly asleep, in the drowsiest hours of the twenty-four, and that gives us one in which to make our escape. One hour ought to put a good deal of distance between us and our enemies, and then we will have daylight in which to travel. I will now retire," he went on, indicating the room he intended to occupy by pointing, and then pointing toward another door, said:

"You gentlemen may go there. Good-night."

This was said in a loud voice, evidently for the benefit of the guards, whom he wished to think he had gone to bed in earnest.

The two men, the detective and the doctor, entered the other room which was lighted only by a candle, the wick of which had been untrimmed for so long that it had drooped over on one side, causing the candle to burn away to the socket on that side. The bed was only intended for one person.

The men instinctively looked inquiringly at each other, and both burst out laughing.

"Who shall occupy the bed, and who sit up?" said the doctor. "Or shall we take turns?"

"My opinion is that neither of us had better retire," said Thad.

"Why?" asked Thurlow, in surprise.

"Listen. My opinion is that this fellow is no more a prisoner here than you and I are—probably not as much as we will prove to be before we get through with this business."

"You astonish me, sir," said Thurlow, in an injured tone. "What could be my friend's motive for pretending to be a prisoner here, unless he really is?"

"I don't pretend to understand his motive, my friend. Let us sit down and smoke a cigar."

The two men lit their cigars and sat down by the window.

The night was very dark, not a star appearing in the heavens, the sky being covered with clouds. It was warm, though, and a soft breeze that rustled some invisible foliage somewhere in the gloom, was grateful to their heated brows as it came in at the open window.

"As I said, I do not pretend to understand this man's motive," continued Thad. "But it looks very strange that a man would allow himself to be carried away like this at this age of the world. I can hardly believe it."

"Why, my dear sir," protested Thurlow, "the man was unconscious—hypnotized by that vicious woman, Sibyl Verne."

"And you really think this thing could be accomplished without his family's knowledge?"

"Probably not. But it certainly could with their knowledge—and consent. In fact, sir, I believe now that his family are at the bottom of the whole conspiracy. You have yourself seen that Montagu is in it."

"Yes."

"And while we were talking I saw another familiar face peep in at the door."

"Who was that?"

"Hoban."

"Who is Hoban?"

"You probably don't know him; but if you had been about the Parkinsons' much you might have noticed a decrepit old man that walks with two canes."

"I have seen such a person."

"That is Hoban."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know, except that he is an inmate of the Parkinson mansion, and like my daughter and this Montagu, is a *protege* of my friend Ainsworth. He was always befriending some one in that way; and you know what ingrates objects of charity are. They are the first to raise their hands against their benefactors."

"You do not imagine your daughter would be guilty of such a thing, do you?"

"I can not tell; I hope not. The others would not scruple, however, to do it, and I believe have done so."

"What could be *their* motive, doctor?" asked Thad.

"To get possession of his property, in my opinion," returned Thurlow, earnestly. "This woman—my wife, is probably at the head of the conspiracy. Knowing that he is in possession of my property, which he holds in trust for my child, she has probably used this as an excuse for her action. Through that she has probably made them believe that she, the mother, was entitled to all of his property."

"What do you think were the relations between your wife and this Montagu, her cousin?"

"I do not dare to think. I have tried to imagine that there was nothing criminal, but it is hard to do under the circumstances."

"Did they elope together?"

"No, not exactly; but he left a few days after she did, and I understood that they were together."

"Who told you?"

"Ainsworth."

"That's what I thought."

"Eh?"

"Why did you not follow them and satisfy yourself upon that point?"

"How could I? I was in jail. As soon as I got out I wrote to her."

"Did you ask her to come back or allow you to go to her?"

"Yes."

"What was her answer?"

"That she dare not."

"Why?"

"She did not say; but I inferred that there was some one had her in his power, or wielded a terrible mysterious influence over her."

"Did you not try to ascertain who this person was?"

"Yes; I asked her."

"And her answer was that she dared not reveal his name, wasn't it?" asked Thad.

"Yes."

"I thought so. But I don't think I would have much difficulty in guessing it."

"You imagine that it was Ainsworth," said the doctor testily. "But you are mistaken. He could have wielded no influence over her, even had he been inclined to, for she always disliked him; so much so, indeed, that she could hardly treat him civilly when he came to my house."

"And yet his treatment of her was—"

"The most courteous and gentle."

"The case as I could have imagined it to a dot," said Thad.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. You and I will both know all about it some day. Now, I want to ask you: Did Ainsworth, to your knowledge, know anything about chemistry?"

"Yes; not in a professional way; but he used to experiment a good deal."

"Did he ever make up, or originate any compounds, that you know of?"

"Yes, he made a poison which he used to sprinkle on the flowers in his mother's garden to kill the insects."

"How did it operate? Did the insects eat the poison?"

"No. There was something curious about the compound. When it was sprinkled upon the flowers the perfume caused it to vaporize, and this vapor was sure death to the insects."

"Um," mused Thad.

This was a bit of information that he had not expected to obtain so easily.

After a short silence the doctor said:

"It is strange that you should have known anything about this; it must be twenty years since he used that stuff; he was a very young man then. I cannot think of anybody now that would remember the circumstance, or in fact, even knew of it. It was only known to his most intimate friends, and they did not number half a dozen. I was among them."

"You are doubtless right, doctor," said Thad, "for nobody told me."

"How did you—?"

But the doctor stopped.

Something outside the window attracted his attention, as indeed it did Thad's also.

It was a crouching form gliding noiselessly toward the window where they sat, which was but a few feet from the ground. That is, the figure had been gliding noiselessly up to that moment, and what attracted the men's attention was the noise made by it in unintentionally stepping upon a stick and breaking it.

It was too dark to see the figure distinctly; in fact, only the vaguest outline could be made out.

The figure evidently saw that it had attracted their attention (probably through their having ceased talking,) for it stopped and crouched more closely against the side of the house.

The men glanced at each other for an instant, each one asking with his eyes what it meant.

Thad was the first one to speak, and that in a whisper so soft that it would have been impossible for the crouching figure to hear.

"That is some plot to get us out of the way," he said. "They have evidently got wind of what we intended to do and propose to thwart our scheme in advance."

"What had we better do?" asked the doctor, in the same soft whisper.

"I might shoot the fellow from here," said Thad, "but there are two objections to such a course. In the first place, it would rouse the inmates of the house, and spoil our chances of success, and in the second, I desire to discover who the party is, and, if possible, his object."

"What do you propose?"

"That is the first thing I propose," replied Thad, putting out the candle and leaving the room in total darkness. "The next is, that we squat down here and be as quiet as we can; or, what is better still, pretend to snore. Ten to one as soon as the fellow hears us snoring, he will climb in at the window, in which case we must be prepared for him. You are armed, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, throw yourself down upon the bed and I will lie down upon the floor on the other side of the room."

A moment later the men had arranged themselves as Thad had suggested, and pretended to snore.

For fully twenty minutes they kept this up, and did not hear a move from the party outside.

Finally, however, they heard some one clambering up the side of the house, and the next moment the dim outline of a head appeared above the window-sill.

The men lay perfectly quiet.

When the party had raised himself high enough so that he could rest on the window-sill, he paused, evidently to listen.

Presently, apparently having satisfied himself that the detective and the doctor were asleep, the fellow put down a leg on the inside.

It had been the detective's intention, as soon as this occurred, to grab the leg; but just at that moment a second hand appeared above the window-sill, and, not desiring to frighten the second party away, the detective waited.

He was a trifle harassed with apprehension in the mean time, lest the doctor should lose patience and attack the intruder, and thus spoil their chances of success.

A moment later the first man had got inside, and the second one was on the point of sliding down on the inside.

The detective had his eye upon the second one, and did not notice the movements of the first one so closely.

The first one approached the bedside very cautiously.

No doubt it was a good thing that the detective did not see this, or, actuated by apprehension for his friend's safety, he might have done something hastily.

Thad was lying close to the wall, on the opposite side of the room from the bed, watching the second fellow's movements.

Finally the second visitor's feet struck the floor, and no sooner had they done so, than Thad grabbed his ankles, and, by a dextrous movement, pulled his legs from under him and brought him to the floor with such a sudden bound, that the fellow evidently didn't know what had happened till his head struck the sharp edge of an iron cuspidore, rendering him temporarily insensible.

Before the fellow could recover his senses, Thad had the handcuffs on him.

In the mean time the first visitor had approached the bedside, expecting, doubtless, to find both men there.

In his hand the doctor could see a knife, and the villain bent over the bed to see how to aim his blow accurately. This was the doctor's opportunity.

Quick as the action of a tiger the doctor sprang up and clutched the fellow by the throat with a gripe that shut off his wind.

The fellow soon weakened and the doctor cried:

"Here, Burr, hurry up; bring a pair of your nippers, quick!"

Hardly were the words out of the doctor's mouth when he was on top of the fellow. He pulled his hands behind him and snapped the cuffs on.

"Now, we'll have a look at the birds," said Thad, taking out his dark-lantern.

The next instant a stream of light shot from the lantern into the face of the fellow that was on the bed.

The doctor gave one glance at the face revealed by the light, and uttered a cry of mingled surprise and despair.

"Great God!" he almost shrieked, "my friend MORTON AINSWORTH! And he wanted to kill me! This is the cruelest thrust that Fortune has ever given me."

And the doctor fainted.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GAME FLOWN.

ALTHOUGH Thad had never seen Ainsworth without disguise, he knew him by the picture he had seen of him.

To say that Ainsworth's face exhibited a look of surprise is to state it mildly.

For a moment the two men eyed each other, and Ainsworth seemed too much overcome with astonishment to either move or speak.

After a little while, however, his feelings appeared to get the better of him, and a look of the most intense hatred and malignity overspread the otherwise handsome features.

He did not speak, though, and after a few seconds realized that his rage would be of little value to him; and then his features underwent another sudden change, this time to that of most abject contrition and injured innocence.

Thad paid no attention to him, in either of his masquerades, and turned his attention to the other man.

He had no trouble in recognizing him as the old man whom the doctor had spoken of as Hoban.

The old man's head was bleeding pretty profusely from the cut he had received, and Thad ripped open the comforter on the bed, pulled out the cotton and stanching the blood.

As soon as he was cared for Thad turned his attention to the doctor, whom he found just returning to consciousness. Having a small flask of brandy in his pocket, the detective poured a little of the liquor down the doctor's throat, which had the effect of soon bringing him to.

The doctor had a strange, wild look in his face when he returned to his senses that frightened the detective at first. It was for all the world like incipient madness; but after a time the expression changed to that of melancholy.

"Well, old fellow," said Thad, "how do you feel now?"

"Better, thank you," replied the doctor, gazing wonderingly about him as though trying to make out where he was.

"I am glad of that," said Thad, cheerfully, lest he should fall back into his old state again; "I am awfully glad of that, old man, for we've got to get away from here now in short order."

Thurlock made no reply, but rose mechanically from the bed, walked to the window and looked out.

The first streaks of morning were shooting up over a distant dark line of forest trees.

He stood there resting his chin upon his hand for some moments, and might have remained there longer had not the noise of the man on the bed caused him to turn.

When Thurlock turned from the window he noticed that the detective had left the room.

The gray light fell upon the face of his friend, which appeared pale, almost to ghastliness.

"Amos," came the low, husky voice of Ainsworth.

Thurlock approached the bed slowly, his hand trembling violently, and he was as pale as death. He gazed at his old friend but did not utter a word.

"Amos," came the voice again.

"Well?" was the almost inaudible answer.

"Amos, unshackle me, help me to escape! For God's sake Amos, old friend! Quick, while he is out!"

A slight glow sprang to Thurlock's face, but he did not move or reply.

"Quick!" cried the other. "No time to lose. Amos, old friend; he will be here in a moment."

"You ask me to do this for you—save your life," said Thurlock in a voice choked with emotion, "when five minutes ago you tried to take my life?"

"No, no, not yours, Amos, old friend; not yours but his. Quick! Help me to escape!"

The next instant the doctor was on top of the prostrate man, and again had him by the throat.

"Repeat that lie, Morton Ainsworth, and you are a dead man! I am willing to forget for the moment the wrongs I have endured at your hands, but when your cowardice compels you to shield yourself behind a lie, my patience is at an end. Confess that you tried to murder me in cold blood, or by heaven, you die!"

A gurgling sound in the fellow's throat indicated that he desired to speak.

Thurlock loosened his grip a little and the fellow said:

"I confess all, Amos," he said, "but I was driven to it by—by—"

To anybody else but this his life-long worshiper and dupe, it would have been plain that the fellow was cudgeling his brain for a fresh lie, but to Thurlock, already again half-way in his toils, it merely meant that his feelings had overcome him too much to allow him to express himself without hesitation.

"By what?" asked the doctor in a trembling voice.

A happy thought appeared to strike the wretch.

"By her," he murmured.

"Myra?"

"Yes."

"Is—she—here?"

Ainsworth saw that he had almost made a blunder, and he just had time to save himself.

It hadn't occurred to him before that Thurlock did not recognize his wife in the bent old woman, or he might have proceeded differently.

"No—no—she is not here now; but she was," replied Ainsworth.

"When—to-night?"

"Yes."

"And she advised you to murder me?"

"She compelled me—threatened to hypnotize me again—"

"When?"

"I mean, the old woman out there did, and Myra threatened to cut my throat."

"Oh!"

"But, Amos, my friend, take these things off my wrist and ankles; I hear him coming."

"I can't; they are locked."

"Break them—there in the corner, in a cupboard, you will find a hatchet, quick! Knock them off my ankles so that I can walk, and I'll manage the other. For God's sake, hurry!"

In another minute, Thurlock had found the hatchet, and with it smashed the irons that confined his friend's legs.

Scarcely was the last blow struck when Ainsworth bounded to the floor, and the next instant he was out of the window.

Not a second too soon, either, for the detective bounded into the room a second later.

One glance was sufficient to tell Thad what had happened.

He glanced at the empty bed, and then at the doctor, who stood there, pale as death, the tell-tale hatchet still in his hand.

The doctor did not wait for Thad to ask him what he had done. The latter's inquiring look was sufficient interrogation.

"Yes," he said, in a trembling voice; "I have done it. I have set my friend at liberty."

"I see you have," said Thad, his voice also trembling, but with anger.

"You cannot blame me, when you consider how I love that man; besides, what he did was no fault of his; he—"

But Thad waited to hear no more.

Taking two or three hasty steps to the window, he sprang to the ground.

A hasty glance about him satisfied the detective that the fugitive was not in sight; but fortunately his footprints were easily discernible in the grass for some distance, and then along the gravel path where the dew-wet pebbles had been disturbed.

Thad hurried along this trail, and soon came to a gate.

Through this he bounded, and found himself in a country road.

Fresh horse tracks led away from the gate and along the road.

Thad's heart sunk within him.

The game was gone.

Without a horse it would be more than folly to attempt to follow.

A moment's reflection satisfied Thad that the whole scheme of escape had been prepared in advance.

While he and the doctor were talking in the little room Ainsworth had got his horse ready, and then returned to the house intending to murder the detective and Thurlock, with the assistance of old Hoban, and this would prevent all chance of pursuit.

He could then take his time in getting away.

The man's native selfishness was manifested in the fact that he made no provisions for old Hoban to escape.

Evidently there were no more horses on the place.

This entirely exploded the theory that Ainsworth was a prisoner, in the detective's mind.

What puzzled him was why Moses had driven him to the place by the difficult route that he did, when he might have come by the way of the plain road.

Thad returned to the house.

Thurlock still sat there upon the side of the bed, with his chin resting in the palms of his hands.

He looked up when the detective entered, and said:

"No sign of him?"

"Yes, plenty of signs of him," said Thad, in a more cheerful voice; "but what I want is the man."

"You will never find him now, I trust," said

the doctor; "at least not till he has been proved innocent of any charge that may be brought against him, and his enemies, the conspirators, are brought to justice."

Thad looked at the doctor a moment; and could not help admiring the frank honest face which showed the man to be as incapable of doing a wrong act as he was of flying.

At last the detective said:

"If he is ever proved innocent, my friend, somebody will have to do some tall lying."

"I do not believe it," affirmed the other stoutly; "and I shall make it my business—my life mission, to prove his innocence and bring these rascals to justice."

"Good!" cried Thad, "I am with you on that. If the man is innocent and the others are guilty, there is nobody more anxious than myself to prove 'it. You are a friend worth having, Doctor Thurlow, and one of whom that fellow is not worthy, as you will discover within a week."

"Nonsense, sir," said Thurlow, coloring; "it is a privilege to be a friend of that man, as you shall learn some time, I trust."

"All right, old man. We will learn the truth at all events. Most men in my position would have arrested you for what you did; but I will not. I admire your devotion too much for that. But don't do it again, or I may act differently."

"I don't care," said Thurlow, testily. "Arrest me if you like; I expect it and deserve it before the law; but I shall liberate my friend every chance I get, and he is confined."

"All right, old fellow," said Thad warmly. "I admire your frankness no less than your devotion. But I shall have an eye on you. And now we had better get ready to get away from here. I will find Moses and see if he knows of any conveyances."

A subsequent search through the house revealed the fact that not only was Moses not there, but nobody else. Not a soul could be found about the premises.

"This is a pretty go," said Thad. "The question is not only how I am to get this prisoner to the city, but how we are to find our own way. I have it," he said after a pause. "I'll make the old fellow act as guide. Come, old man, get up!" he cried shaking the old fellow.

Old Hoban raised himself to his feet as well as his stiff joints would permit, but not without a good deal of grumbling, mingled with profanity.

The detective got him outside, after taking the shackles from his ankles so that he could walk, and started him down the path toward the road.

The old man limped along and said nothing. When they finally reached the road the old man turned in an opposite direction from that taken by Ainsworth.

"Hold on!" cried Thad. "Where are you going?"

"Where do you want to go?" growled Hoban. "To the city."

"Wal, then, ye'll hev ter go in another direction altogether," said the old man. "I s'posed you knowed which way you wanted ter go."

"No, I only guessed at it. You lead the way and we'll follow."

The old man turned back through the gate, and struck into a path that led across the fields in an opposite direction from the road.

Thad and the doctor followed in silence for some time.

After awhile Thad said:

"Where did Ainsworth go, old man?"

"I dunno," growled Hoban.

"Don't you imagine you could remember in case it brought your own liberty?"

"No, sir; not if it was to save my neck from the halter!" said the old man firmly.

"That is just about what this affair will cost you."

"I don't keer. He's outen it."

"I am not so sure about that," said Thad, who saw a chance of leading the old man into a revelation. "There is no place on the face of the earth where a murderer can hide so that he won't be discovered."

"Maybe," growled old Hoban; "but the master isn't a murderer; and then he can go where nobody can't find him."

"Where is that, Hoban?" asked Thad.

The old man turned round and looked the detective in the face, with a queer expression.

"Now, then, you don't think as I'm so green as all thet, do ye?" he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Thad, innocently.

"You don't think I'm goin' ter tell where he's gone ter, do yer?"

"Why not?"

"'Cause I won't."

"A man of your age should know more than to screen a criminal," severely.

"He's no criminal, I wanter hev ye know," snapped the old man.

"Bravo!" ejaculated Thurlow, who had been a silent, but attentive listener all this time.

Thad saw that he was among enemies, but he did not flinch.

"If he is an innocent man," addressing the doctor this time, "why did he run away?"

"That he is the victim of circumstances I

shall not deny," said Thurlow. "He has doubtless fallen into the hands of a gang of rascally conspirators that not only menaced his life, but placed him in a suspicious position."

"That's true," said old Hoban warmly, "them fellers and thet woman would enjoy nothin' so much as killin' him; and yit they ain't none of 'em that ain't e't his bread these many years. That's jist the way with yer charity critters; allus ungrateful."

"You are right," cried Thurlow, enthusiastically. "Isn't that what I said, Burr?"

"Yes," replied Thad, dryly, who was beginning to think that probably there was something in the conspiracy theory after all.

If there wasn't, he thought, this man had two of the most abject slaves that ever fawned upon an impostor. And the strangest thing about it was the difference in the two men intellectually. One was little better than a clown, while the other was a more than ordinarily intelligent man; and yet they had the same opinion of this man, saint or hypocrite, whichever he was.

An hour's brisk walk brought the party to Kingsbridge, where they took the cars for downtown.

As soon as Thad had turned the old man over to the police, and got his breakfast, he went to his "Studio" and made himself up to resemble a lawyer of that class known as "shysters," such as usually hang about police courts to get a chance to skin some simple person.

He then went to the Barrett House to see the person whose card Dr. Thurlow had given him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEW REVELATIONS.

ACCORDING to the card which Thad had, the man's name was Silas Benton, and the detective sent up as his own card, one of a number he always had on hand for such emergencies, which indicated that his name was "J. Felix Sharpe, attorney and solicitor."

Benton was a wiry little black-eyed man, with a nervous temperament and a whining voice, and the general appearance of a man that was up to snuff in every particular.

And he must have thought he saw his match in Thad, who was made up with a fiery red wig, every hair of which stood on end, a bristling mustache of the same hue, shaggy eyebrows and a scarlet nose.

As soon as Thad announced that he was Morton Ainsworth's attorney and had come to treat with Mr. Benton in regard to any matters that gentleman might have against his client, the little lawyer was profuse in his hospitality.

"Sit down, Brother Sharpe," he cried, "I am delighted to see you."

When Thad was seated, he said:

"Now, Mr. Benton, what is this matter you have against my client?"

"Well, the fact is, we may as well be frank with each other—the fact is, it is not a legitimate account that I have against Mr. Ainsworth, or Rogers, as we knew him. You see, to be plain, he was at the head of a so-called banking concern which has just been found to be one of the biggest swindles ever known on the Pacific Coast. It has also just come to light, that your client has been guilty of two murders, one of these his wife, within the last five years."

"Are the facts in either case sufficiently authenticated to warrant prosecution, Mr. Benton?" asked Thad.

"Quite so, sir," said the little man, emphatically. "There is enough in either of the cases to imprison him for life."

"When did you arrive here, Mr. Benton?"

"Yesterday morning."

"I presume you have heard of the death of my client, then?"

"Yes, yes; I learned that he had died mysteriously, supposed by some to have been murdered."

"How long have you been in possession of the facts in regard to Mr. Ainsworth's criminality?" asked Thad.

"About a month."

"And you have communicated with no one here regarding the matter?"

"Oh, yes. I have communicated with an attorney here."

"And of course he mentioned the matter to my client?"

"Yes."

"Do you not think your mode of procedure all the way through has been a trifle irregular, Mr. Benton?"

"How so?"

"This is not a civil case, sir. According to your own statement, each and every one of the charges is based upon a criminal offense. Is not that true?"

"Yes."

"In that case, then, what business had you dealing with a lawyer? The chief of police is the party you had business with."

"I understand all that, Mr. Sharpe, as well as you do," said the little lawyer, chafing his hands and smiling; "but your client has money and a social position, and it might be more comfortable all 'round to preserve the honor of his family, and, and—"

"I understand."

"You understand."

"Yes. Blackmail, we sometimes hear it called by vulgar people."

"Very vulgar people do call it that sometimes. Te, he, he!" laughed the little lawyer.

"You say that this New York lawyer with whom you were in communication consulted my client in the matter?"

"Yes."

"What was the latter's answer?"

"He seemed to think the terms too high, but on being pushed—"

"You mean threatened?"

"Well, yes, if you like to put it that way. On being threatened a little, he agreed to our proposition, but put us off until after his marriage."

"What were your terms?"

"Merely an assignment of all his property to—to—the wronged parties."

"I see. You were modest in your demand," said Thad, laughing.

"It might be thought a little stiff by some," said the other; "but what is wealth compared with personal liberty, or life, it might amount to?"

"Very true. Still you could not blame my client for wanting to wait till after his marriage to an heiress before assigning his last dollar."

"No, I presume not."

"Well, what was the outcome of your negotiations?"

"Nothing. Just at the moment when our New York attorney led us to believe that we might expect a favorable settlement, we received the news of your client's death."

"And what do you propose now?"

The little lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Your client is beyond our jurisdiction now, of course; but his family is still left, and may be willing to pay something to preserve an honorable memory for their deceased relative."

"No doubt they will, Mr. Benton," said Thad.

"Have you affidavits and all the necessary documents to prove the guilt of my client at a moment's notice?"

"Everything," said Benton.

"Very well," said Thad, rising to go; "call upon me at No. — Thirteenth street, to-morrow evening, and bring the documents along, and I will see what can be done in the premises."

Thad returned to his studio as soon as he had got through with the lawyer, and was pleased to find young Cockerall waiting for him.

"You received my telegram, I presume?" were the young man's first words.

"Yes, and have since seen Ainsworth in the flesh," rejoined Thad.

"What?"

"As sure as you live."

"Where is he now?"

"That I do not know, but would like to very much; in fact, I must find him, if possible, by to-morrow night."

"Then you shall," said Cockerall.

"What do you mean?" demanded Thad, greatly astonished at the promise.

"That Morton Ainsworth shall be forthcoming whenever you want him."

"You know where he is, then?"

"Yes. By some hook or crook he discovered that I had had the other body exhumed, and knew that he, Ainsworth, was not dead, so he came to me for protection against his persecutors, as he calls them. Believing, as I did, up to that moment, that the man really was the victim of persecution, I concealed him where nobody will discover him till the proper time comes."

"Then you have ceased to believe that he is a victim of persecution?"

"Most decidedly."

"What caused you to change your mind?"

"Partly his own talk, but principally some papers I discovered," said the young man, tossing the big pocketbook on the table in front of the detective.

Thad was both delighted and surprised.

It was the identical pocketbook which it had caused him so much to recover from the shanty of Mother O'Roark, and which the beautiful woman had recaptured, and was supposed to have taken to the bottom of the river with her.

"Where did you get them?" demanded Thad in ecstasies.

"From Ainsworth's pocket while he was asleep," returned Cockerall; "but here is another of more importance," he went on, tossing the detective a letter. "Read that, and you will be surprised."

Thad took the letter from its envelope and unfolded it. As soon as he saw who it was from, he said:

"Not so much surprised as you imagine."

"What do you mean?"

"I know all about this affair."

"You do? Is there anything you do not know, Mr. Burr?"

"If there is, it is something that I have not had a chance to find out. But let us see what the letter says:

"SAN FRANCISCO, 221 July, 18—.

"SAM'L ROGERS, ESQ.:—

"Sir:—The Pacific Slope Investment and Loan Association has collapsed, as you probably have been apprised ere this.

"You may also be aware that the methods of that concern, as subsequently exposed, were such that each and every one of its officers and trustees is indictable for fraud, and obtaining money under false pretenses; and we desire to inform you that we hold warrants for your arrest and extradition as president of the institution.

"Another matter has just come to light, through the execution of a former dup of yours, one Joel Ives. In his confession he stated that he had, some five years ago, at your command, and in consideration of a certain sum of money, murdered a man who was your partner at the time. Also, that, during the same year, for a similar consideration, he had put your wife out of the way. The deponent further states that the manner of operation was this: That you were the originator of a subtle and powerful compound, which could only be used by putting it on flowers, or mixing it with a pungent perfume of some kind; and this was what he had employed in each case.

"Inasmuch as the wretch only knew you by one of your numerous aliases, the authorities here, after making a feeble attempt to find the McGregor referred to, allowed the matter to drop.

"We have come in possession of these facts by accident, however, and propose to push the matter to the bitter end.

"If you desire to arrange a settlement of the matter, you will do well to see our New York attorney, Mr. Julius R. Fleecer, 120 Temple court.

"An early settlement will save trouble all round.

"Respectfully, etc.,

"MUMFORD & SLEGG."

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Cockerall, as soon as Thad had finished the letter.

"Blackmail, pure and simple," was the detective's reply.

"That may be; but that does not alter the fact that he is probably guilty of every thing he is charged with."

"No, to be sure not."

"And to me it opens up an entirely new theory," said Cockerall.

"What's that?"

"That this whole alleged conspiracy, the supposed murder, the hypnotism and abduction, was all a sham, originated by himself."

"Exactly the theory that I have had for some time, ever since I read the letter you found in the cemetery," said Thad. "It stood to reason, although I kept you in the dark in regard to it at the time, that this affair could not have been carried out in his own house without the family's knowledge and consent, or else his own, in which case his lackeys could arrange the affair according to his direction. I only waited to discover a motive on his part, and now I have it. He had reached that point in his career when it was necessary to disappear from the world, and this would have been the most effectual way to do it, had the thing been a success."

"It was a success, it seems to me."

"Yes, so far as the world in general are concerned. By the way, nobody up there knows anything of the exhuming affair, do they?"

"Nothing of the result. All they know is that the body was taken up with the expectation of finding poison in it. I satisfied their curiosity by telling them that none was found."

"That's good. Keep the whole thing quiet for the present. Your sister knows nothing, of course?"

"Not a word."

"Good. Now, I'll tell you what I'd like you to do, my boy."

"Well?"

"I want you to fetch Ainsworth to my rooms here some time to-morrow afternoon."

"I don't see how the thing is to be done, except by force."

"No, you must not do it by force. He must think that he is going to a safer place. Take him to the house of my friend Mud, No. — Fourteenth street, and he will show you the way into the secret passage. Once in there he will imagine he is going to a place of safety. The passage leads directly in here."

"Very well, you may depend upon me."

"I will have somebody here to face him, and we shall see how he stands the ordeal. In the mean time I shall procure a warrant for his arrest in case it turns out as we expect."

"Wouldn't you and I feel cheap, though, if it should turn out some other way?"

"A little, maybe."

"By the way," said Cockerall, "did you get the warrant for the woman's arrest?"

"Yes; but I haven't served it yet, for two reasons: First of all, if this should turn out to be the work of Ainsworth himself, she is neither guilty of murder or abduction, but merely accessory to a fraud. The whole matter that puzzles me now is the exact relation that his lackies or dupes bear toward him. The Jew and the woman are ready to denounce him as a scoundrel, while Montagu and old Hoban worship the ground that he stands on. Now, the question is, are all these people merely his dupes, or are they, as Ainsworth himself and his friend Thurlow both claim, leagued in a conspiracy against him?"

"That does put another face on it," said Cockerall, reflectively. "But so far as Moses is concerned, and the woman, too, for that matter, little dependence can be placed in their word."

"That is true; they would be as apt to abuse him for a mere blind as not," said Thad. "Here is a thing that puzzles me a little, too. The fellow, Montagu, who, by the way, is not half

the idiot he appears to be, told me the first time I saw him that Sibyl Verne had committed the murder, and it was he, also, that told me of Moses."

"There is some great mystery about it somewhere," said Cockerall, shaking his head.

"Yes, there appears to be now, my boy; but it will all be plain to-morrow. Mark my words."

"I hope so. Good-by."

"Good-by, my boy. To-morrow afternoon, remember."

"Yes."

Thad was anxious to discover, if possible, how the Parkinson family stood in relation to the conspiracy, if there was any such a thing, or to Ainsworth's fraudulent scheme, if such it was, supposing, of course, that they knew anything about either; and the latter he was particularly anxious to find out. So, as he had a little time on his hands he concluded to run up to Newburg and have another talk with Miss Bettie, or, if possible, her mother.

As he entered the grounds and was walking along the path toward the house, what was his surprise to see Montagu strolling about among the shrubbery as coolly and with the same idiotic expression that he had worn when he first saw him.

The detective caught his eye and beckoned to him to approach.

The fellow slouched up with the same idiotic indifference as he had formerly done.

As soon as he was close enough to be addressed without danger of being heard by others, Thad said:

"Hullo, Montagu, what became of Rogers?"

The fellow's face was a study.

He was apparently undecided whether it was better to try to keep up the delusion or not. Before he had time to decide, however, Thad said:

"It's no use, my boy. I'm onto your racket with both feet. I was there last night."

The imbecility had all vanished from the fellow's face, and his eyes, so far from being expressionless, were full of expression.

"Sh-sh! not here," he said. "Come into the room on the left side of hall when you are through with Bettie."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE "OWL'S" STORY.

WHEN Thad entered the parlor, Bettie was glad to see him, and received him very cordially.

"Well, what do you think of me now?" she asked as soon as they were seated.

"What do you mean?" he was forced to ask, for he really had no idea to what she referred.

"Since you made the discovery that I am not Miss Parkinson at all, but instead, the daughter of two very wretched and very bad people."

"I can think none the less of you on that or any other account, Miss Bettie," said Thad; "and allow me to say that, whatever your mother is, your father is a very excellent man."

"Possibly. But you must not forget, nor must I, that the shadow of a heinous crime hangs over him, Mr. Burr."

"I do not forget that, Miss Bettie, but I trust and believe that I shall be able to dispel that shadow within the next twenty-four hours, as well as clear away a good many other mysteries."

"If you do, sir," said the girl, blushing, "you and I will be excellent friends from that moment."

"Then I shall be amply repaid for all my efforts in the matter, Miss Bettie. Have you seen your father or mother lately?"

"I saw him a month ago, but have never seen her to know her in my life. I have seen the person they call Sibyl Verne from a distance. I think she has always avoided me."

"May I ask you, how and when you heard of this thing, Miss Bettie?"

"My mother—that is Mrs. Parkinson—told me yesterday."

"How did you feel about it?"

"Oh, it didn't worry me much," she said with a laugh and toss of the head. "I was surprised, of course; getting a new set of parents is a little but not much more serious matter with me than getting a new pair of shoes. They both have been broken in, I suppose. The only difference is, the parents in this case don't appear to match."

"That is certainly a fault," said Thad, laughing at her drollery. "What did Mrs. Parkinson seem to think about it?"

"She didn't think about it. It's an old story to her."

"I understand that. What I mean is, did she not appear to suffer any grief at being compelled to break the news to you, and thus weaken to some extent the affection that a child has for its mother?"

"She didn't seem to break her heart of it. You see I've always been such a harum-scarum piece of business that she never got very deeply set on me, I guess."

"Of course your foster-mother and sister are still in deep mourning over Mr. Ainsworth?"

"Oh, yes."

"I do not see that you mourn much, Miss Bettie," said Thad, smiling.

"No. You see, I don't believe in doing a thing of that kind, unless you are in great big dead earnest."

"Then you are not so terribly cast down about the death of your uncle?"

"Not so much but that I will survive."

"Didn't you like him?"

She looked at the detective a moment, and then said:

"I don't know that I ought to tell you. I kind of hate to lie; and yet if I tell you the truth, you will probably remember what I told you the first time I ever met you about him being so universally adored."

"I do remember that."

"Well, that was true, only it didn't apply to me. As I say, I oughtn't to tell you, and would not, only for the fact that you have made so many discoveries on your account."

Thad started a little at this.

"How did you know that I had made discoveries, Miss Bettie?" he asked.

"I live with my eyes open."

"You know all, then?"

"I do."

"And Montagu is not as much of an idiot as people imagine."

"Not by any means."

"Miss Bettie, I would like to ask you one question, if it is fair."

"Well, sir?"

"Have not you and Montagu been probing this question for a good while for the purpose of discovering the truth and exposing somebody?"

"Not exactly that. Montagu has known the facts for years, but has been powerless to act. I knew nothing until lately, and then there came a time when there was a motive for me to do something, and I became Montagu's confidante."

"And that motive was—?"

"My own affairs."

"Entirely?"

"Well—nearly so," laughing.

"May I guess it?"

She was silent and reflective for a moment.

"Yes. You will know it all sooner or later anyway, I presume."

"Ainsworth opposed your marriage with Theodore Cockerall. On the other hand Theodore's family had received an intimation that your family was not all that could be desired; and this through Ainsworth trying to shield himself. By sifting things to the bottom, you clear your own reputation and have revenge upon him. How near am I right?"

"Very near it. But that is not all I have against this man."

"What else?"

"Do not ask me now," she said firmly. "You are to have Ainsworth at your place in New York to-morrow evening."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind. I will be there also, and so will somebody else. You think you know something now, Mr. Burr. Wait till then."

"I shall, and with a great deal of anxiety," said Thad. "By the way, do your mother and sister—that is, Mrs. and Miss Parkinson, know anything of this matter?"

"Nothing; and I prefer that they should not."

"It seems strange that you should never have met your mother, Miss Bettie, when she was so frequently with Montagu, and you were his confidante."

"Not at all. In the first place I did not know till yesterday that she was my mother. Montagu knew it; but did not want to let me know anything about it, lest I should feel the disgrace; and he would not let her know it because, while, impetuous woman that he says she is, she would have come here, doubtless, and taken me away. This he did not desire should happen just yet. He could go and come, under cover of his assumed imbecility, as he likes."

"Does your mother know where you are now, miss?"

"No, sir. She knows that I am living, and trusts to Montagu to restore me to her."

"Now, I would like to ask you another thing: Do you know whether your mother and Montagu originated this scheme of pretended murder, kidnapping, etc.?"

"They did not."

"It was Ainsworth's own scheme, then, to evade some impending calamity?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Do you know the nature of that calamity?"

"No, sir. I imagine he had committed some crime, though."

"Very well. Now, if your mother and Montagu were the enemies of Ainsworth, will you tell me, first, how he came to get them to carry out the scheme; and second, why they agreed to do it?"

"Yes, sir; that is simple enough. In the first place, he never suspected for a moment that they were not his staunchest friends; and in the second place, they were willing to help him with his scheme, because they knew that that would

be the quickest and surest way of exposing his villainy."

"Were you not shocked at the idea of a man pretending to die, Miss Bettie, and—"

"Excuse me, sir," she cried, sharply. "I know what you are going to say; and want to tell you now that I knew nothing about the affair then, and have only a vague idea of the manner of its perpetration now."

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Thad, somewhat embarrassed. "I, of course, did not know but you might have been told the particulars, and it struck me that the details would be shocking to a young girl's sensibilities. And now, Miss Bettie, I will leave you. I shall see you to-morrow evening without fail, I trust."

"Yes, sir."

When the detective stepped into the hall, he was fortunate enough to find it vacant; and more fortunate still, to find Montagu's door partly ajar, so that he stepped in without the possibility of attracting any attention, even if there had been any one there.

He found Montagu, in spite of his enormous head, quite an ordinary-looking man, and he talked as sensibly as the common run of men.

"I told you to come in," he said, when the detective was seated, "because I did not want you to speak of this matter in the garden, where we might be overheard by the old lady and Louise, who know nothing about it."

The detective was silent a moment.

"From what I can learn, Mr. Montagu," he said at last, "you are the deadly enemy of Mr. Ainsworth, and are seeking his overthrow."

Montagu laughed.

"It matters little who seeks or does not seek his overthrow; he was bound to accomplish it himself sooner or later," he said.

"But you were perfectly willing to aid him in it."

"Perhaps. Why not?" with a broad smile.

"Is he not your benefactor?"

"Assuredly."

"Then why can you conscientiously do such a thing?"

"Is not that the best of reasons why I should assist him in his downfall, or anything else in which he needed assistance?"

"But, my dear fellow, joking aside, do you consider it right to eat a man's bread, and then betray him?"

Montagu looked at the detective very seriously for a moment, and then said in slow, measured tones:

"Mr. Burr, when the bread that I eat amounts to the interest on the money which this scoundrel has robbed me of, I shall be satisfied, and ask for no more."

"He has wronged you, then?"

"Yes, more than words can tell; but you will hear it all to-morrow evening—that is, as much as can be told in human language."

"What has been your motive in assuming the character of an imbecile?"

"To accomplish my purpose, to be able to wreak the revenge I crave. While he thought I had my wits, I could not approach him, either to claim my dues or avenge my wrongs; but when he found me wandering about the streets apparently a poor idiot, he took pity on me and gave me a home. Once within his home, I could sting him."

"He is not entirely heartless, then, you admit," said Thad.

"On the contrary, he is as susceptible to pity as a child. He will cut your throat and take your purse, and then share his last crust with the first beggar that comes along. This was demonstrated in his treatment of Thurlow."

"He has really wronged Thurlow, has he?"

"More deeply even than he has me. No man could suffer greater wrong at the hands of another than Thurlow has of him."

"And yet Thurlow still has faith in him."

"Yes, worships him," said Montagu, with an air of disgust. "Thurlow is a fool in this respect. I never saw such unselfish adoration of a rotten idol in my life. I believe it to be a species of insanity."

"There is something strange about it. But in what way have you avenged yourself upon Ainsworth, besides the present trouble you have precipitated upon him?"

"A thousand ways," cried Montagu, vehemently. "I have exposed his rascalities, brought about disagreements between him and the other rascals with whom he was in league. It was through my exposure of one of his tricks that caused him to murder his partner, five years ago. It was the only way he had of saving his neck from the halter. This partner, as big a rascal as himself, learning through me that Ainsworth, or McGregor, as he called himself then, was perpetrating frauds that endangered his neck, threatened to expose him; and it cost the poor wretch his life."

"Why didn't you expose this murder, and have Ainsworth arrested?" asked Thad.

"I could prove nothing. The man died suddenly, but the doctors attributed his death to alcoholism, which looked very probable, as the fellow was always drunk."

"How did you know about it?"

"I overheard the contract he made with a fellow named Joel Ives to do the job."

"And you did not notify the police?"

"Yes; but I was known as an idiot, and got an insult for my pains. It was the same when he murdered his wife, or got Ives to do it for him. Nobody would believe me in cases of that kind. But the rascally lawyers who are after him now, saw there was a chance to make something out of it, and that accounts for their enthusiasm. It takes a rogue to catch a rogue, you know."

"What was your object in telling me on my first visit here that Ainsworth was dead, and that Sibyl Verne killed him?"

"That was a part of the scheme. I knew that would not only cause you to investigate the matter, but it would furnish you a clew. You came up here to investigate a supposed mysterious murder, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose I had kept quiet or told you the truth? In either case you would only have learned half of what you know now and will learn to-morrow evening. For Ainsworth would have kept out of the way for one thing, and Sibyl could never have been induced to make the exposure she intends doing."

"Why?"

"She would have been afraid."

"Is she under his control so completely as all that?"

"She always has been until lately. She was as great a worshiper of him as Thurlow, and added to her idolatry was abject fear."

"How came she to take the name of Sibyl Verne?"

"I presume she took a fancy to it. Her reason for taking an assumed name at all, though, was to prevent her husband and child from knowing that she is still living. They know it now; but she thinks they believe her dead."

"Why did she want them to believe that she was dead?"

"Because she had disgraced them, or thought she had."

"By eloping with yourself, eh?"

The look that Montagu gave the detective was a mixture of indignation and injured innocence; but after a moment his features relaxed and he said:

"That is a superstition of Amos Thurlow's. I shall not pretend to deny it; I prefer that you should have the truth from Myra herself, which you will to-morrow."

Thad was silent for some moments.

Finally he said:

"You appear to have a pretty strong case against this man, Mr. Montagu. The only weak part of it is the character of his accusers. Part of them are self-admitted rascals, blackmailers, and the like, against two earnest, honest men of fair, one of them excellent intelligence. I'm afraid your conspiracy won't bear the light of investigation."

Had a thunderbolt fallen through the window at that moment it could not have caused the fellow greater surprise or consternation than did this outburst of the detective's.

He did not deign a reply, but rose abruptly and left the room.

On his way to the depot the detective met Cockerall, who was about to take the train for New York to inform him that Ainsworth had disappeared.

CHAPTER XX.

A WILD-GOOSE CHASE.

THE detective knit his brows at this news.

His face assumed an expression of mingled annoyance and disappointment.

He was on the point of addressing a few severe words of censure to the young man for his carelessness; but one glance at the latter's face disarmed the detective.

Young Cockerall was the picture of despair.

So Thad's kind heart got the better of his temporary anger, his face softened and he said, in a gentle voice:

"How did it happen, old man?"

"I cannot tell," replied Cockerall. "You see, my idea was to keep him a prisoner without his knowing it, and for that reason kept a guard over him, pretending of course that the guard was to protect him from his enemies. A good deal of liberty was given him, and I am afraid the guard grew careless."

"But it is strange that he should have gone without letting you know," said Thad, with a puzzled countenance. "He must have received some intimation that he was a prisoner."

"On the contrary, it is my opinion that it was through no inclination on his own part that Ainsworth left."

"What do you mean?"

"That he was abducted by his enemies."

"That is ridiculous."

"How so?"

"That was the story Ainsworth gave me before, and I found that there was not a word of truth in it; then, on the contrary, it was his own scheme from beginning to end."

"I know; but it is different this time, I am positive."

"What leads you to think so? Were any of the crowd of so-called conspirators about?"

"No; and that is what confirms my suspicions," said Cockerall. "If any of those people had been about I should at once have come to the conclusion that it was a voluntary act on the part of Ainsworth, assisted, as he has been before, by these rascals."

"You still think, then, that Ainsworth is using these people as his tools, do you?"

"I certainly do," said the young man; "don't you?"

"I do not. My original theory of a conspiracy still holds good. But that is not the point at present. You haven't answered my question as to why you believed Ainsworth to have been spirited away."

"Why, my reason for this belief comes from the fact that a stranger was seen hanging about apparently trying to get an opportunity to speak to this man."

"Did you see the stranger?" asked Thad, quickly, his detective instinct being sharpened at once.

"No, sir, but the guard did. It was while I was away in New York."

"Did your guard describe the stranger?"

"Yes; he described him as a medium-sized man, with black hair and beard, and extremely piercing black eyes."

"Heavens!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. You never met Doctor Thurlow, did you?"

"No. Why?"

"Nothing. Did you get no clew from your guard as to which direction the parties took?"

"No."

"Or what means of transportation they employed?"

"No; but they must have gone by rail, if they went any great distance, for they had no other conveyance."

"This stranger did not bring a conveyance with him, then?"

"Not to my knowledge, and the guard is quite sure he didn't, for the last time he saw the stranger about he shadowed him some distance, several blocks, in fact, and he was still walking when he left him."

"Did the stranger go in the direction of the railroad depot?"

"No; and that is what puzzles me so much. If he had gone to one of the depots we could easily trace him."

"Yes, and if your guard hadn't been a block-head he would have followed him until he discovered where he went, if it took six months," said Thad, with an air of disgust. "The idea of a man following another just far enough not to discover anything. However," he continued, after a pause, "there is no good in crying over spilt milk. The man is gone and must be found. My plans are all knocked in the head, unless he can be got to my rooms to-morrow night. We have twenty-four hours in which to work, and if we can't develop something in that time we may as well give it up."

"What is your immediate plan, sir?" asked the young man.

"I shall return to New York at once," replied Thad. "What I shall do there I must keep secret for the present."

"And what do you want me to do in the mean time?"

"Stay here and keep as close a watch upon the movements of Montagu and—and your sweetheart as possible."

"What do you mean?" demanded Cockerall, coloring at the mention of his betrothed.

"Take no offense, my young friend," said Thad, kindly, laying a hand upon the young man's arm; "but in the prosecution of the detective profession we must lose sight of all ties and relationships, and, without suspecting any, watch all. Do you understand?"

"I think I do," returned Cockerall in a calmer voice. "But you must have some reason for suspecting Bettie, or you wouldn't ask me to keep a watch upon her."

"I may or may not have, my young friend, and I will ask you not to question me on that point; I only ask you, as the only one capable of such a thing, to keep a quiet watch upon Miss Bettie's movements until to-morrow. If you discover nothing, so much the better for your peace of mind; whereas, if you do find anything you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you alone are in possession of the facts."

The young man was silent for several minutes, and the detective could see that there was a struggle going on in his breast between sentiment and duty.

The latter finally appeared to conquer, for he said, in a husky voice:

"I will do as you request, Mr. Burr, although the very idea of suspecting that girl of anything wrong is repugnant to me."

"Good, my boy," cried Thad, slapping him on the shoulder. "Nobody respects your feelings more than I do, and nobody glories in your heroism more. Good-by. Let me know, if anything develops in the mean time."

Thad wrung the young man's hand and dashed away.

He was in the nick of time to catch the 7:15 train for New York, and a little over an hour later was in his "studio."

In the mean time his mind had been active in working out this latest and most difficult problem with which he had had to contend, so that by the time he reached the room his plans were all matured.

His first move, therefore, was to again make himself up as he had been when he accompanied Thurlow and Moses in search of Ainsworth.

When this was done, he went to the office of Dr. Barker, and upon inquiry found, as he expected, that Dr. Thurlow was absent.

"I knew no reason that he would be absent," he said to the old woman who met him at the door; "although I hoped that he might have got through with his case and returned, so that he could assist me with the other one."

The old woman stared at him in bewilderment; but he could see that he had scored a hit, for she evidently believed that the two "doctors" were engaged upon some case together; but she made no comment.

"Did the doctor leave my tracheotomy tube in the office?" asked Thad.

"I don't know," replied the old woman. "If you'll come in, an' wait till Doctor Barker comes, maybe he can tell you."

"How long before Doctor Barker will return?"

"I can't tell. He ought to be here now. He's liable to come any minute."

"Very well, I will go into the office and wait," said Thad, pushing past the old woman, and entering the front or consultation-room.

Having seen him seated in an easy-chair, the old woman withdrew and closed the door.

Now was the detective's opportunity.

The desk used by Dr. Thurlow stood open in front of him, and was littered up with letters and other papers.

If the other doctor would only delay his return long enough, Thad had no idea but that he would succeed in finding something among that mass of papers that would throw light upon the subject he desired.

To this end he at once went to work examining the papers.

One after another was opened, glanced over with that nervous haste peculiar to one who realizes that his time is limited, and that he may be discovered any second.

Most of the papers were bills or calls, with now and then a friendly letter from some brother practitioner or patient, but not a line from or referring to Ainsworth or any of the conspirators.

Minute after minute flew by and the pile of documents rapidly dwindled, but still nothing of importance had been discovered.

Finally the last scrap of paper had been glanced at, with no better result, and Thad heard somebody enter the front door.

That it was Dr. Barker the detective hadn't the least doubt, and his hopes sunk to zero.

His last chance had vanished, unless, indeed, the doctor could tell him where Thurlow had gone.

Fortunately the approaching footsteps stopped in the hall, and the new-comer had evidently paused to speak to the old lady.

This afforded the detective another minute, and he improved the time by taking a hasty inventory of the desk and its contents.

But nothing met his eye but account books and the like, and his heart again sunk.

Now the footsteps in the hall advanced again, and he felt that all was over with him.

Still his eye was not idle.

It darted here and there with the rapidity of lightning, taking in every detail of desk, contents and surroundings.

Finally he heard the hand on the door-knob, which increased his nervousness, but at the same time his desire to accomplish something in the few remaining seconds; so the quick eye went on with its search and increased in the rapidity of its movements.

The knob turned and the door swung open, and, as Thad expected, Dr. Barker stood before him.

But brief as the time had been between the first movement of the door-knob and the doctor's entrance, the detective had really accomplished something—a great deal, in fact.

Just as the door began to swing on its hinges, the quick detective eye had darted from the last detail of the desk in the direction of the floor, and there it was arrested by the appearance of a waste-basket.

The basket was two-thirds full of scrap-paper, letters, etc., but on the very top of all, the detective espied a letter, or the remains of a letter, rather, which appeared to have been torn with more care than is usually bestowed upon such matters, that is, it was torn in smaller bits.

Fortunately the mass of small scraps had fallen into the folds of a sheet which had not been torn, so that it was the easiest matter in the world to gather it all up at once.

This the detective did so quickly and deftly that the doctor did not notice the action, and never suspected that the calm, innocent-looking person before him had just concealed something in his pocket.

Thad arose upon the doctor's entrance and introduced himself as Dr. Stevenson, a friend of Dr. Thurlow.

"Glad to know you, doctor," said Barker; "I think I have heard Thurlow speak of you."

"I have no doubt," returned Thad. "I have just called in to see if the doctor had left a tracheotomy tube here which he borrowed yesterday at my office."

"I have seen nothing of it," said the doctor, glancing about over Thurlow's desk. "However, he may have it with him now, as he has gone to perform some kind of an operation of the throat, now."

This statement came like a thunderbolt to the detective. If Thurlow really was away on professional business, what became of his (Thad's) theory that it was he that had taken Ainsworth away?

However, he still hoped. The doctor might be mistaken; or what was more probable, Thurlow might have told him this to cover up his real whereabouts.

"Are you sure he has gone to perform that operation?" asked Thad, as though he knew that Thurlow had intended to go.

"Sure? I couldn't be much surer, as I was with him until a few minutes ago."

"Oh, then you saw him perform the operation—or assisted him, perhaps?"

"No; he was about to perform the operation when I was called away to attend another patient."

This was a hint for Thad. A physician is never called away from one patient to attend another, except in the hospital, therefore, Thurlow was probably at that moment at the hospital on 125th street, which the detective had visited for the purpose of finding him once before.

It would be as well, though, he thought, to ascertain for certain in advance, and thus save a good deal of unnecessary tramping.

"Let me see," said Thad, "it seems to me that the doctor said this case of his was at the hospital; this is the same one, I presume?"

"No; this one is on Thirty-ninth street, near North River. Do you wish to see the doctor personally, or do you merely want to get your tube?"

There was something both in the locality named, which is about the worst in the city, and in the question that followed it, that aroused the detective's suspicions.

Perhaps there was no reason for it in either case, but somehow or other it struck him at once this was only a subterfuge to conceal the real truth, and he determined to probe it to the bottom.

"Both," he replied. "I desire that Doctor Thurlow should assist me in an operation, and before we can perform the operation, we must have the tracheotomy tube. Do you imagine I would find Thurlow there now?"

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly. It will take some time to complete the operation, and he will have to remain some time afterward to watch the result."

"Certainly," said Thad, with a knowing professional look. "Will you kindly give me the address of the patient he is attending, doctor?"

The doctor gave the number, and Thad hurried away.

At Eighth avenue he jumped into a cab, and a few minutes' lively driving brought him to the place, which proved to be a large, gloomy tenement-house, crowded to suffocation with dirty, noisy people.

According to directions the detective had to climb to the sixth floor, up narrow, dirty stairs, often having to push his way past the ill-smelling and sometimes half-drunken tenants.

He finally reached the right floor and knocked at the door.

After a little delay a slattern woman with a bloated complexion came to the door.

To Thad's inquiry she said the doctor had just gone; but as Thad imagined there was something suspicious about the way she glanced back into the room as she made the remark, he was not satisfied, and asked to see the patient which the doctor had just operated upon.

The woman burst out laughing, and said that she was the patient.

This seemed to put an end to the matter. There was no longer any excuse for demanding admittance, and he must take the woman's word for it that the doctor was gone.

With a disappointed heart the detective turned away, and the woman shut the door.

But what could it all mean?

There was certainly something very strange in the woman's actions; besides, why should Dr. Barker have told him that he would undoubtedly find Thurlow there. It could not be that he had made a mistake in the number, for the woman recognized the doctor's name at once, and claimed to be the patient.

While these puzzling thoughts were passing through his mind, the detective was slowly and mechanically descending the poorly-lighted stairs.

He had already descended two flights of stairs, and had just reached the third, when he met a villainous-looking man standing at the head of the stairs.

Thad did not like the looks of the fellow, but as he appeared to take no notice of him, he passed on. He had no more than reached the second step, however, when a shadow warned

him in time to dodge a sledge-hammer blow from the ruffian; but in doing so, he lost his footing and fell to the bottom of the stairs.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LUCKY ACCIDENT.

So violent and rapid was the detective's fall that, active as he was ordinarily, he was unable to save himself, and when he reached the bottom of the stairs, he struck his head upon the newel-post with such force that he at once became unconscious.

When he recovered his consciousness, he found himself on a rude bed in a small, dark room, the air of which was so close and foul that he could scarcely breathe.

As soon as his senses had returned sufficiently for him to realize what was going on about him, he became aware that there was talking near by.

Raising himself upon his elbow to listen, he discovered that the talking was in the adjoining room to where he lay, and that the intervening door was partly open.

The detective raised himself to a sitting posture, and was delighted to find that he was not badly hurt, but merely stunned, the wig having shielded his head from the fall.

He now made another discovery, however, that wasn't so delightful, and that was, that somebody had "gone through him" and taken not only his pocketbook and watch, but all his papers and other effects which he had in his pockets.

For a moment he was almost furious at his ill-luck. He did not care so much for the loss of his watch and money, although it was bad enough, but some of the papers, especially the scraps picked out of the doctor's waste-basket, were invaluable to the detective, to say nothing of the valuable time he was wasting. But a moment's reflection convinced him that worry was useless under the circumstances, and his only salvation lay in stratagem, and he set about it without delay.

Climbing out of bed as quietly as possible, Thad approached the partly-open door and peeped into the next room.

The sight which met his gaze was by no means encouraging.

Three men and two women sat around a table, upon which was a suspicious-looking black bottle and several glasses, and from the appearance of the five people they had been indulging pretty lively in the contents of the bottle.

A smoky lamp sat in the center of the table and threw a feeble glow upon the inflamed countenances gathered about it.

The five persons were deeply absorbed in something which Thad at first thought was some sort of a game; but upon closer scrutiny he discovered that they were trying to fit together a mass of small particles of some kind, the nature of which the detective could not make out.

All at once it flashed upon him.

It was the torn-up letter which he had found in the basket.

But what interest, thought Thad, could these people have in the demolished letter?

Surely they must have some—a good deal in fact, to work as patiently as they were doing, to adjust the irregular particles into a perfect mosaic whole. Among them Thad recognized the bully whom he encountered on the stairs.

For a long time they—or rather she, for one of the two women appeared to be doing all the brain-work—worked silently and patiently, but after a while the others seemed to lose patience with her and began to criticise her methods.

This caused the woman to fly into a rage, and for a while it looked as though there would be a fight, and Thad feared that in such a case the problem of what the fragments of paper were would never be solved.

He was more anxious to solve it now that these people took an interest in it, than ever.

Before he only thought of it as a possible clew to the whereabouts of Thurlow, but now he believed it to be something of vastly more importance.

Finally the big man said:

"Now look'e hyar, Liz, thar's only one way o' puttin' them things together right."

"How's that?" growled the woman.

"Git a big card an' paste 'em onter it," replied the big man.

"How air ye goin' ter do that, when it's wrote on both sides o' the paper?" asked the woman.

This was a poser for all hands for awhile; but after a little one of the other men seemed to have a sudden inspiration, for he said:

"I have it—git a pane of glass and paste them on it."

"That is a good scheme," assented the woman; "but where are ye goin' ter git the glass?"

"I'll fix ye out in that line," said the man who had before spoken.

With that he sprang up and walked through the room where Thad was, so abruptly that he had barely time to dodge into a dark corner before he entered the door.

Fortunately the fellow did not see the detective, who squatted in a dark corner.

The next moment the man returned from the rear of the house with a pane of glass and re-entered the front room.

Placing the glass on the table the man gave it a thin coating of paste, and the five persons again gathered about the woman, who was the principal operator, as before, and were soon absorbed in the work.

Minute after minute passed, and minutes ran into hours, and still the tedious work went on.

Thad was an interested spectator, for they were doing the work that he would be compelled to do if they did not; besides, the fact of their doing it at all proved to him that they were greatly interested, and might open up an entirely new theory.

Finally, along about midnight, the last fragment was put in place and the four people gathered closer than ever to hear the fifth one read the restored letter.

Unfortunately the detective could not catch enough to understand what the document was, on account of the low tone of voice in which the woman read it; but at its conclusion the discussion that followed afforded him a good deal of information, and led him to wonder that they had not murdered him instead of leaving him on the bed.

After some general conversation, the purport of which Thad did not catch, the big man said:

"Wal, if he went at the time appointed they are there long afore this, an' if we expect to do anything we've gotter hustle, for once he gits in the cave he's safe from all of us."

"The chances is though," put in a short, square-shouldered man, whom they called "Warts," "that they won't go direct thar to-night, but stop in the log cabin in the mountains, an' if we take the midnight train to Cairo we kin git a rig thar early in the mornin' and drive out to ther cabin long afore they'll expect visitors."

"I don't b'lieve it," growled the third man, whom they called Jim. "Doc's got nerve enough; but t'other'll be trimblin' in his boots till he's beyond reach of everybody, and I don't b'lieve he'll let Doc stop till they're safe inside the cave."

"W'at d'ye propose ter do, then?" demanded the big man; "let him escape entirely, or leave him for the detective?"

"No. All I say is, thar ain't no hurry. We've only got to watch ther hole where ther rat went in and ketch it when it comes out; for it must come out some time. And as for ther detective," continued Jim, jerking his thumb in the direction of the room where Thad was concealed, "we kin blamed easy watch him, I reckon."

"W'at d'ye mean?" growled the big man.

"I mean," said Jim, "thet it'll take that cove a good month to git onto ther scent, an' in less than half that time the game'll hev to come out to air its whiskers, an' we'll have it."

"I know a game worth two o' thet," said the big man.

"What's that?"

"W'y, fix ther bloke so's he can't travel."

"What d'ye mean, fix him so's he'll leak wind?" laughed Jim.

"That's it," chuckled the big man; "fix him up so's he won't hafter use his nose or mouth nuther to breathe."

"In other words," said the woman who had put the letter together, drawing her finger significantly across her throat, "give him a new mouth, eh, Steve?"

"That's w'at I said, Liz," chuckled the big brute.

"Wal, we've done 'bout nuff talkin'," growled Warts; "and we're losin' time. Now, who's agoin' ter do ther job?"

"You, if you like," snarled the big man.

"Wal, I don't mind," said Warts. "But what's the sense o' puttin' it onto one?"

"Ye ain't afraid, air ye, Warts?" laughed the woman called Liz.

"No, I ain't afraid, but—"

"Ye're a leetle nervous," sneered Liz. "Why, say, I don't mind doin' it meself. The feller's limp as a rag since Steve give 'im the touch on the head. Gimme a knife, an' I'll fix his flute."

"You don't dare, Liz," laughed the big man, with an admiring glance at the woman. "Ye're a brave little woman; but ye don't dare ter do that."

"Don't I?" cried Liz, rolling up her sleeves. "Just watch me."

With that she took a long, keen dagger which Steve had given her, and started toward the room, closely followed by the other four, who were to act as curious and amused spectators.

In the meantime the detective had not been idle.

As soon as he discovered what they proposed to do, he began a hasty preparation for them.

Taking off his coat, he hastily buttoned it around one of the pillows. To the bottom of this he attached a pair of pants which he found hanging in the room, into the legs of which he had stuffed a lot of other clothing.

Putting this "dummy" on the bed, the detective took off his wig, folded some rags and put inside of it, and placed it above the collar of the coat to look like the back of a man's head.

Having completed his preparations, he got into a closet directly opposite, and, from the smallness of the room, scarcely more than a yard away from the bed, and awaited results.

Thad was entirely unarmed, but he concluded to trust to stratagem, that being his only available weapon.

When the woman pushed open the room-door and saw how dark it was in the apartment, she turned to her companions and told them to fetch the lamp.

The big man returned to the table in the front room and brought the lamp.

In the mean time the woman, dagger in hand, had approached the side of the bed, and was in about the right position to strike the fatal blow when Steve reached the door with the lamp, which threw a dim light over the gloomy room.

"That'll do," said Liz. "Don't come any further with the light; I can see well enough."

This was an excellent arrangement for Thad, for it was so dark where he was that he could see his would-be assassins without the least danger of being seen himself.

The woman approached a little nearer to the bed, gave a hasty glance at what she believed to be her victim, and raised her knife.

Now was his opportunity.

With an agile and noiseless movement he sprang to her side, grasped the wrist of the raised arm close to the blade which it clutched, and adroitly wrenched the knife away.

This rendered the woman defenseless, and Thad would never, when it was possible to avoid it, assault a woman.

He therefore clapped his hand over her mouth to prevent her from screaming, and raising her in his arms, thrust her into the closet and locked the door.

All this was done so quickly and noiselessly that the rest of the crowd didn't realize that anything had happened until it was all over; their first intimation that anything was wrongs was a moment later when the woman began to scream.

That was what Thad expected, and even desired, for he knew it would throw the others into a panic and virtually place them at his mercy.

And his calculations were right.

Without waiting to reason or consider the probable cause of her outcry, the big man transferred the lamp to one of the others and rushed into the room.

In his excitement he miscalculated the direction of the noise, and seemed to think it came from the bed, and consequently ran in that direction.

Thad had all the advantage in his dark corner, and the big man rushed almost on top of him without seeing him.

The moment he got within easy range of Thad's fist, however, he did not proceed any further, for the detective let drive a sledge-hammer blow, striking the big fellow in the temple and curling him up on the floor.

By this time the others appeared to realize that something had happened, and they rushed in.

The foremost had the misfortune to fall over the prostrate form of the big man, however, and a well-aimed kick from the detective's boot settled him for the time being.

His companion was more fortunate, and striking out in the dark, succeeded in landing an ugly blow in Thad's neck which felled him to the floor. This would not have happened only for the fact that the detective had not recovered his balance after kicking Warts into insensibility, and could not defend himself.

As he went down, though, Thad grasped the fellow by the collar and brought him down with him.

A severe struggle now ensued.

The ruffian was not quite a match for the detective physically, but he had the advantage of being on top.

Still, he could do Thad no particular harm beyond scratching his face a little, and the latter soon succeeded in transferring his fingers from the fellow's collar to his throat.

Under the vise-like gripe of the detective the ruffian's strength soon began to leave him, and a moment later Thad had turned his antagonist under, and was quietly proceeding to choke him into insensibility, when the big fellow suddenly raised himself to a sitting posture and clutched the detective by the throat.

The tremendous strength of the big fellow added to that of the other, weak as he had become, was fast overpowering Thad, and he felt that there was only one thing to be done.

He still had the knife, which he had wrenched from the woman, in his belt, and horrible as was the idea of murder to him, he felt that it was his only resource.

He found some difficulty in getting his hand to his belt on account of the big fellow lying on top of him, but he finally succeeded in drawing the knife and, nerving himself for the blow, plunged it with all the strength left in him, into the big fellow's side.

The big fellow uttered a groan of pain and almost instantly became unconscious.

But he still lay on the detective, and the latter had a severe struggle to remove the tremendous weight.

He had no time to lose in freeing himself either, for he could see that the other two men were fast regaining consciousness.

And to add to the peril of his situation, the woman who had been holding the lamp, up to that time, came in, at the earnest solicitation of the woman in the closet and, unlocking the door, released her.

Thad had just succeeded in crawling out from under the senseless form of the big man, but had not regained his feet, when the woman sprang from the closet like a tigress, and picking up a revolver which had been dropped by some of the party, leveled it at Thad's head and fired.

The next instant the detective rolled over insensible upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IT must have been several hours before Thad returned to consciousness, and when he did he was almost inclined to believe that he was either still unconscious or in another world.

At all events, he could scarcely believe his eyes.

The dead body that he expected to see was gone; also the living ones, men and women.

But in their stead was one living body that he did not expect to see.

It was none other than Bettie Parkinson.

How she got there was no less a riddle than that she was there.

While he was still staring in blank amazement at what appeared to be a phantom, she set his mind at rest by saying:

"I'm so glad you have come to at last, sir. How do you feel now?"

"All right," said Thad, still uncertain whether he was awake or not.

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Bettie. "You had a pretty close call that time. If the ball had gone a sixteenth of an inch lower you would have been a dead man."

This caused the detective additional astonishment, and to verify her assertion he instinctively put his hand to his head, where he found an ugly welt, as large as his finger, ranging from just above the temple to the crown of his head, where the ball from the woman's pistol had torn along.

Thad was silent and reflective for a few minutes, and had to be aroused again by his restorer.

"Come," she said, "we must be moving, if you have strength enough."

"Yes, I am all right," he said, rising and straightening his cramped limbs.

"I'm glad of it," she answered, promptly, "for we have no time to waste."

Again he looked on the girl in bewilderment.

"Time for what?" he asked at length.

"To be after them," she replied, impatiently. "Whom?"

She looked at him savagely for a single instant, but his puzzled countenance explained all to her, and at the same time amused her. She burst out laughing.

"Pardon me," she said; "I forgot that you had been unconscious for the last hour or so. The fact is, the people you saw here have all gone in search of our friend Ainsworth. If they find him the truth of the great mystery will probably never be known."

"How do you know this?" he asked.

"Well, in the first place, I heard them say so, and if there was any doubt about it, read this," she continued, handing him the pane of glass upon which the restored letter had been pasted.

Thad took the glass and glanced hastily over the letter.

It was as follows:

"DEAR AMOS:—

"The bloodhounds are again on my track, and with sharper appetites than ever. You know whom I mean. Mag is inclined to spare me, and she may tell you of the others' intentions. See her, by all means. Under pretense of operating on her throat, which is still troubling her, you can gain an interview with her. Take Barker along, if you think he can do any good."

"I am now under the protection of a pretended friend, who is planning to give me away as soon as everything is ready. This I got from Louise, who overheard a conversation between my alleged friend and guardian and his sweetheart."

"If you were ever a friend to me, Amos, come at once to my rescue. I will meet you at the depot, and we can go to the cabin in the Alleghany Mountains for a day or two, and if things get too hot we can go to the cave."

"The detective is also after me, as you probably know, and it would only be prolonging my misery to fall into his hands. We must escape all of them. Do not fail me, my dear friend, as this is a case of life and death."

"Your best and truest friend, "M. A."

"Isn't that a surprise to you?" asked Bettie.

"Not much of a surprise," returned Thad.

"The only surprise about it is that I should have been the unconscious means of bringing the information to these people, that they should have recognized the letter well enough to suspect that it contained the information, and then that they should have furnished me with the information which I was seeking."

"But rather dearly bought, my friend," laughed Bettie.

"Yes, but might have been worse," said Thad. "But tell me, my guardian angel, how came you here? How did you know I was here; how did you escape death at the hands of these wretches; and how is it that they left me with a little life in my body?"

"Anything else?" laughed Bettie.

"Nothing more at present."

"Well, I want to inform you that you shall have nothing until we are well on our way in pursuit of these people and Ainsworth."

"Do you know the way?" asked Thad, in surprise.

"Montagu does, and he is going with us."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone for a doctor for you. He will be back in a few minutes."

"Well, I am happy to say, my young friend, that I do not need a doctor. What's this?" exclaimed the detective, suddenly, looking down at Bettie's costume.

He had just noticed that she was attired in boy's clothing.

"Oh, a little scheme of my own," she said, with a merry little laugh. "You see it isn't convenient to get about with petticoats on; besides it is apt to excite remark."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when the door opened and Montagu entered accompanied by the doctor.

The latter dressed Thad's wound, which he pronounced of no consequence, and then took his leave.

Our friends then left the tenement; and, calling a hack, drove to the detective's rooms.

Here Thad changed his make-up and costume to that of an ordinary traveling man.

He also disguised Bettie as a natty young man, with a waxed mustache, and Montagu as a middle-aged man, with slightly gray beard.

The three then drove away to the depot, where they took the train for Cairo.

It was just daybreak when the train pulled out of the depot.

"Now, my little friend," said Thad, when the train had got under way—

"Call me, Charlie," said Bettie.

"All right; Charlie it is," said Thad, laughing. "Well, Charlie, tell me how you came to follow me to that horrible den, and all about it."

"Montagu here is to blame," said Bettie; "and he had better tell you about it."

"No; you go on," said Montagu. "You know as much about it as I do, and can tell it a great deal better."

"Very well," said Bettie. "In the first place, Mr. Cockerall told me that Ainsworth had disappeared, and I told him that you ought to know about it. He said you did know about it, and admitted that you had gone in search of him. The moment I heard that, something told me that you were going to have trouble, and I determined to help you if I could."

"Very kind and thoughtful of you, indeed," said Thad, whose conscience pricked him for what he had said to Cockerall about the brave little woman.

"Of course I didn't feel like going alone, and spoke to Montagu, who kindly volunteered to accompany me. He also suggested that I disguise myself, so that my friends wouldn't recognize me if they saw me."

"Well, we learned that you had come to the city, and we followed you here. Montagu found out where your rooms were, and we started there, but met you coming out."

"How did you recognize me?"

"Montagu knew you, because he had seen you in the same disguise before."

"I remember," said Thad. "It was when I went with Moses and Thurlow to find Ainsworth; I was then disguised as a doctor."

"Yes. Well, having seen you coming out of your place," continued Bettie, "we concluded to follow you."

"We saw you enter the house on Forty-second street, and waited for you to come out. At length you did come out, and again we followed you, and saw you go into the tenement on Thirty-ninth street."

"Again we waited; but you did not make your appearance for so long that we concluded to go up."

"After wandering about the gloomy place for a long time, we happened to get on the right floor just as we heard the pistol-shot."

"I surmised that something was wrong, and told Monty that we must get in there if it took a limb."

"Brave girl—I mean boy," said Thad.

"Well, after skirmishing round for some time, I found that being small I could climb through a transom into the kitchen."

"As soon as I got inside I opened the door for Monty."

"We then made our way to the room where you were. It was awful dark; but we could see a light in the front room."

"They had already brought the big man to with brandy, and he had staggered into the front room, where the five of them talked over their plans. It seemed that the big man was bleeding pretty freely from a stab which I understood

you gave him, and one of the men went away, or started away with him, to a doctor's."

"That, I knew, was our chance."

"Monty had provided himself with a couple of large pistols, so I asked him to let me take one, and he took the other, and we opened fire on them."

"Did you hit any one?" asked Thad, laughing.

"No, of course not. I couldn't hit the side of a barn, and Monty is worse than I am—"

"You only think so," growled Montagu, who wasn't pleased at this estimate of his marksmanship.

"At any rate, we didn't touch a hair," continued Bettie; "but we did what was quite as essential."

"What was that?" queried Thad.

"We made them run."

"Run?" exclaimed Montagu, apparently taking a sudden interest in the story; "I never saw anything like it, and I've seen cattle stampeded on the plains. The only thing that I wonder at, is how they got down those stairs so fast without breaking all their cursed necks."

"Well, that is all there is of it," concluded Bettie; "except that Monty went for the doctor and you came to your senses without him."

"And I must say again," said Thad, taking Bettie's hand, "that you are a remarkably brave little girl. And as for you, old fellow," he went on, turning to Montagu, "you are simply a lion; and, in short, I thank you both, and am extremely proud to call you my friends. And now, do you think it likely that these people have gone yet?"

"That is hard to tell," replied Bettie; "but I should imagine they had, as they appeared to be in a great hurry to get away. Still the big man's wound may delay matters a little."

"I know they were in a great hurry to get away," said Thad; "for they were talking about taking the midnight train."

"Perhaps they would have done so if you hadn't put them to so much trouble," laughed Bettie.

"That's a way I have," said Thad, laughing. "I'm always making trouble for people. But tell me, how do you know about this place to which Ainsworth has gone?"

"Monty knows about it; I don't. He was out there with that lovely uncle of mine once."

"So you know the ground thoroughly, do you?" he said, addressing Montagu.

"About as well as I know the way to my mouth, I reckon," replied Montagu.

"That is lucky; we won't have any trouble in finding the place."

The detective was silent and thoughtful for some time. Finally he said:

"Do you know anything about these people, Mr. Montagu? I mean these ruffians with whom I had the trouble."

"Nothing, except the big fellow," replied Montagu. "His name is Stephen Humphrey, and he used to live in Cleveland, Ohio."

"Aha! What were his relations to Ainsworth; do you know?"

"Not exactly. I only know that this fellow and Moses Ernsstein were mixed up in something out there for which they were sent to the penitentiary for several years, and that they both claimed that Ainsworth was into it as deeply as themselves; but of course, as everybody knew them to be rascals, nobody would believe them."

"I see," said Thad, whose mind at that moment was running on certain remarks he had heard from Moses to the effect that Ainsworth was a bigger rogue than himself, and "that was useless."

It must be owned that the detective's views in regard to Ainsworth and his so-called persecutors had been somewhat modified since the affair in the tenement-house; and yet he was still somewhat inclined to believe that he was more sinned against than sinning. And this last revelation was not calculated to weaken the opinion in the least. For Thad Burr, being a thoroughly upright man himself, was loth to take the word of a known scoundrel against an apparently good man.

"It's a wonder you never ran across Steve in the course of working up this case," said Montagu after a long pause. "He and Moses run together a good deal, and they both made their headquarters over at Old Mother O'Roark's till you broke the place up."

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Thad. "I thought I recognized that fellow's face, and for the life of me I couldn't place him. I must be losing my memory. Why, I had an encounter with him the night I went over there in search of the papers, and I left him curled up with the handcuffs on. That was all I could do, as I had no charge against him and no warrant. I wonder if he recognized me," continued Thad, laughing.

"Hardly, I guess, or he wouldn't have left you alive," said Montagu.

"Well, to return to what we were first talking about, what do you imagine their present designs against Ainsworth are?"

"I might be wrong in my guess; but if I were in Ainsworth's shoes I should want a great big insurance policy on my life."

"You think they intend to kill him, do you?"

"I do; that is, if they get an opportunity."

"It is strange that, holding this grudge for so long—many years, perhaps—this fellow has never thought of taking revenge before."

"Perhaps he has thought of it many times; but the right opportunity never presented itself before. In fact, he and Moses both have taken a certain amount of revenge for a good many years, out of the old man."

"How was that?"

"They have levied a pretty regular system of assessments on him for the past seventeen years that I know of."

"Blackmail, eh?"

"I s'pose you'd call it that. At all events, they have come for money at odd times, sometimes once a week, sometimes once a month, and they always got it."

"And that looks pretty bad," interposed Bettie.

"Not necessarily," said Thad. "There is many an innocent man the victim of the shrewd blackmailer. Some unfortunate circumstance may place a timid man into a position where his good name is at stake, or he thinks it is, and rather than face the disgrace he will sacrifice everything."

"And do you imagine that lovely uncle of mine is that kind of a sainted martyr, Mr. Burr?" said Bettie, with an ironical expression.

"It might be."

"Then you're away off."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HIDDEN FOES.

It was still early in the forenoon when Thad and his two friends arrived in Cairo, a village in the Alleghany Mountains, and after stopping long enough to get breakfast, procured horses and proceeded at once toward the cabin in the hills.

Before they had gone far the country became very wild and the road rugged and steep.

Sometimes the road lay between steep, beetling cliffs, and was so narrow that they had to ride single file; at other times even this was almost impossible; but our friends toiled on.

At last, late in the forenoon, they came to a place where a horse could no longer walk, and Montagu said:

"We'll have to hitch the horses here and go it on foot for a while."

So saying he dismounted, and the others followed his example.

They hitched their horses and, following Montagu, proceeded to climb the side of a steep hill.

After a weary climb of half an hour they reached the top and came to a level stretch or plateau, heavily wooded, that extended some distance back to another taller hill. Near the foot of this latter stood a small log cabin.

"There is the cabin," said Montagu, "and I suppose they will be there. What shall we do?"

"I will manage that," returned Thad. "You remain here while I go and reconnoiter."

Montagu and Bettie seated themselves upon a log, while the detective made his way to the cabin.

As he neared the cabin he noticed that there was smoke issuing from the chimney, which led him to believe and hope that his game was there, and he formulated a plan of operations as he went along, which was to walk boldly in and represent himself as being what he looked, a traveling man.

But to his surprise, on reaching the door, he discovered that the cabin was empty.

There were indications that some one had been there recently. As he had noticed, there was a fire in the wide, old-fashioned fireplace, which had been replenished within a very short time, and there were also indications that cooking had been done, showing that Ainsworth and Thurlow must have got their breakfast there.

This, together with the fact that the door was not fastened, led the detective to believe that they were still near by.

He noticed that there was a ladder leading up into the loft, and concluded that they might be concealed there, but did not deem it prudent to go up just then.

Stepping outside, Thad beckoned to Montagu and Bettie to come on up to the cabin.

As soon as they arrived, the detective whispered his suspicions to them, but Montagu shook his head.

"I hardly think you will find them there," he said. "My opinion is that they have gone to the cave."

"They must have gone very recently, then," said Thad; "for see, the wood has scarcely commenced burning. The chances are, in my opinion, that we have come upon them so suddenly that they haven't had time to get outside of the house."

"There would be no necessity for them to go outside to get to the cave," said Montagu. "There is a tunnel running from the cabin to the cave."

"Where is the cave?"

"Only a hundred yards or so from the cabin."

"Where is the entrance to the tunnel?"

"Right under this trap-door," said Montagu, pointing to a trap-door in the floor, which, by reason of a strip of matting over one side of it, would not be noticed unless your attention were called to it.

Thad raised the door and looked down.

A ladder led down into the tunnel.

The detective's mind was instantly made up what to do.

"You know, of course, where the mouth of the cave is?" he said to Montagu.

"Yes," replied the latter.

"Very well; I want you to watch that while I go through the tunnel."

"What am I going to do?" inquired Bettie, in an injured tone. "Am I good for nothing?"

"No you are not, my girl—boy, I mean, and you shall do something. You shall stand guard with Montagu, if you like; but I was going to spare you the danger incurred in such a thing."

"Danger?"

"Yes. The chances are that you will have to fight if you stand guard."

"Then I shall do it, by all means!" cried Bettie, delighted at the prospect. "Nothing could please me better than to have a little skirmish."

"You will probably have a chance to gratify your ambition," said Thad. "Now, the first thing to be done is to ascertain whether they are up-stairs or not, for I still think it possible that they may have gone up there instead of down into the tunnel; and as it will not be prudent to go up in such a way as to expose ourselves, I shall resort to an old but nevertheless clever trick."

So saying, the detective placed his hat upon his cane and proceeded to climb the ladder, holding the hat above his head.

As he had half-expected, the hat no sooner rose above the level of the floor than it was perforated by half a dozen bullets.

"Better for the empty hat to get them than my head," said Thad, descending the ladder again. "Well, that proves my suspicions to have been correct. They are undoubtedly up there. The only thing that puzzles me is how two men could have managed to fire so many shots in so short a space of time. I believe there are more of them."

"I shouldn't wonder if Moses was with him," said Montagu.

"That is hardly possible, I think," said Thad, "since you say that it was through Ainsworth that Moses was sent to the penitentiary along with the fellow, Steve Humphrey."

"That makes no difference to Moses," rejoined Montagu. "He is just as likely to be with him for all that."

"Wouldn't he be likely to crave revenge as well as the other fellow?"

"Not he. Moses, like other mortals, treasures his wrongs, I presume; but self-interest goes a good deal further with him. He will swallow his anger, if there is profit in it."

"In other words, he's anybody's friend for the mighty dollar," said Thad, smiling.

"That's it."

"Well, it may be then that Moses is with them. Or, hold! I have an idea. I wonder if it isn't the other crowd, after all?"

"I shouldn't wonder at all," said Montagu. "They had several hours the start of us, provided Steve wasn't too badly hurt to travel."

"True enough," assented Thad. "Well, whoever it is, they must be got out of there."

"How are you going to do it?"

"That is a very simple matter, my boy," said Thad, pulling the blankets off a bed standing in one corner of the cabin. "Look about and find some paper."

The detective went up the ladder again and fastened the blankets in a wad near the top. By that time Montagu had found some old newspapers, which he handed up to Thad. The latter struck a match and lighted the papers and held them under the blankets.

Another moment the blankets were afire, but of course they did not blaze; they merely smoked and made the most horrible smudge.

"That will make it interesting for them," said Thad, descending the ladder again. "If they don't come out of there pretty soon, I shall be surprised. Now, you go outside, Montagu, and watch lest they should find some means of escape through the roof. Charlie and I will shut off their retreat here."

Montagu did as he was bidden, and Thad stood for a long time watching the ladder, revolver in hand.

Minute after minute went by, the blankets continued to burn, sending up clouds of black, horribly-smelling smoke, but no one appeared at the hatch, nor could the detective hear the least movement overhead.

This surprised him.

How any one could exist in that smoke was something he could not understand.

"This beats my time," said he. "It can't be possible that they have succeeded in making their escape without Montagu seeing them. Go out and see what he is doing, Charlie."

Bettie went out, but soon returned to say that Montagu was in a position to see them if they had come out of the roof, and was positive that they had not.

A half an hour went by, and still there was

neither the appearance of any one or the sound of a living being overhead; and then an hour with the same result.

"This is most remarkable," said Thad at last. "What can it mean? It would be utterly impossible for a human to live in that smudge this length of time. They must be salamanders."

"Perhaps they have their mouths to air-holes or cracks," suggested Bettie.

"That might be possible," consented Thad; "but they would have had to move to get their mouths to the air-holes; and I'll swear there has been no walking since I have been here."

More time elapsed, and still there was no sign of any one; and the worst part of it was the blankets were by this time nearly consumed, and the smoke gradually growing less in volume.

Finally the flame had eaten through the last particle of the blankets, and the charred mass fell to the floor.

"Well," said Thad, "there is but one alternative left. Smoke won't affect them; let us see what fire will do."

"What do you mean?" asked Bettie.

"I mean that we will have to fire the cabin and burn them out."

Saying which, he lighted another paper, and going up the ladder again, held it, the flame, against the floor of the loft, which was made of dry pine boards, and in a minute it was in a blaze.

Descending the ladder again, he first pulled the fire out of the fireplace on to the trap-door, and then he and Bettie went out of doors and joined Montagu.

"We'll fetch them out now, old fellow," said Thad. "They weathered the smoke all right; but I don't think they will be able to stand the fire."

"What have you done, set fire to the cabin?" asked Montagu in surprise.

"That is what I have done," answered Thad.

"We had better watch the ladder then," said Montagu.

"It will not be necessary. We can stop them as they attempt to come out of the door."

"They may not come out, but go down through the hatch into the tunnel."

"There is no danger of that, my boy; that road will be rather hot for him."

"How so?"

"I fired the trap-door too."

"That's good."

"It will serve a double purpose, this firing the cabin," said the detective, after a pause. "It will save us the necessity of watching that exit to the cave."

By this time the flames had eaten their way through the dry roof and were leaping high above the cabin, and yet the men did not make their appearance.

Thad began to be puzzled.

"Well, well," he exclaimed after a while, "this is very remarkable. I shall begin to think pretty soon that those fellows are salamanders or some other kind of fire-bugs. I can't understand it, unless, possibly, they were overcome with the smoke at the very outset; but even that theory is hardly tenable from the fact that they would have created some noise in the act of fainting."

Minute after minute went by, and still no one appeared.

The perspiration began to come out on Thad's brow, and his face wore a puzzled expression.

What could it all mean?

Finally the roof fell in, and it was evident from the cloud of sparks that shot up, that the loft had fallen also, thus rendering it impossible for any one to live in the cabin.

Now the detective was puzzled.

"This is remarkable," he said. "There is but one theory left, and that is that there was some way out of the cabin that we didn't know of."

"I don't think there was any other way besides the door and the tunnel," said Montagu.

"In fact, I am positive of it, as I was here when the cabin was built, and know every detail of it."

"There is a vague possibility," said Thad, "that there was such a thing as a set gun, or rather several of them, and that I set them off when I pushed my hat up through the hatchway. If that is the case I have wasted a lot of valuable time to no purpose. But let us waste no more time. Take me to the mouth of the cave at once, Montagu."

Without a word Montagu led the way toward the cave, which, as he had said, was about a hundred yards distant from the cabin, and the intervening ground was covered with a thick growth of trees and underbrush, so that it could not be seen from the cabin.

"We want to keep our eyes open in getting through here," said Thad. "This is an excellent place for ambush."

He had scarcely finished speaking when a bullet whizzed past his ear, closely followed by the report of a rifle, which showed it to have been fired at short range.

"This is getting interesting," said Thad, turning a trifle pale. "Let us get to the cave as soon as possible."

They hurried on and the rest of the jour-

ney was accomplished without further interruption.

The entrance to the cave was very narrow, and so low that it was necessary for a man to stoop in order to enter, and was flanked on either side by heaps of loose stones.

"It is going to be a little hazardous to enter," remarked the detective, pausing outside of the heap of stones. "A man in a dark room, especially a cave, has a great advantage over an intruder. We must use tact. How large is the cave inside?"

"Only a small affair," replied Montagu. "Perhaps twenty feet square."

"Any other entrance except by this door and the tunnel?"

"No."

"And no way of getting into the tunnel now, since we burned the cabin?"

"None. But there is a fissure in the rock forming the roof which admits a little light, and by going up on the hill there we can see into the cave, if they have any light inside."

"That is good," said Thad. "Perhaps a little water poured down there might not be amiss."

They climbed up the rocky hill, in the side of which the cave pierced. Here the rocks were piled about in such disorderly profusion that our friends had no difficulty in finding hiding-places from which they could not only peep into the cave, but they could view the surrounding neighborhood and watch for approaching enemies.

It was too black inside the cave, however, for them to see anything, which was pretty good evidence that there were no occupants, or if there were any, they had no light.

While Thad was deliberating upon what was best to be done, footsteps were heard coming through the cave below, and a moment later Steve Humphrey and his two pals approached and entered the cave.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

It was evident from the deliberate manner in which Humphrey and his two pals entered the cave, that they had been there before, and that very recently, and therefore knew the place to be unoccupied.

This was another puzzling affair.

Where could Ainsworth and Thurlow be?

Could it be possible—and the thought struck Thad with a force of horror—that Humphrey and his fellows had already accomplished their devilish work, and murdered the two men?

Such a thing was not only possible but probable, and if it were true the only motive for these fellows to still remain out here, was to evade justice.

No sooner had the three men got inside the cave than they began to talk, and by placing his ear down to the fissure in the rock Thad could hear everything they said very plainly.

Steve was angry and disappointed about something, and was berating his pals for their want of tact or discretion, and they were as stoutly defending themselves as best they could.

"Now, look 'ee hyar," Steve was heard to say at last, "when Thurlow come thar to doctor Liz's throat, didn't he ask a good many questions about what I intended to do?"

"I b'lieve he did ask a few questions," said Warts, "but I thought it was all out o' friendship for you. He pretended to think the world and all of you, you know."

"Yes, he thinks as much of me as I do of my prayer-book," growled Steve; "and you, like a pair of chumps, give the chap all my plans, didn't you?"

"No, I only told him that you might settle the old score with Ainsworth pretty soon; and he said that was right; and asked me if I thought you would follow him if he left the city, and I told him I didn't know about that."

"That was the whole scheme. He wanted to find out what Ainsworth asked him to in the letter that Liz patched up, that is, what I calculated to do, and he done it. The only thing that puzzles me is how he knowed that we knowed where his hidin'-place was, fer he must have knowed it and given us the slip."

"You don't think they come out hyar at all then, eh?" said Warts.

"No, I don't. Thurlow found out some way that I was onto his racket and they went in another direction."

"Who d'ye think the cove was that had the scraps of letter in his pocket?" asked Warts.

"What, the duck that I knocked down-stairs, and afterward stuck the dirk into me?" growled Steve, savagely.

"Yes."

"Oh, some spy of Thurlow's, I reckon."

"Don't you s'pose he might 'a' found out sumthin'?"

"If he did, he probably kept it," returned Steve, with a chuckle. "Liz fixed him all right."

"What air ye goin' ter do now?" queried Warts, after a pause.

"Stay right hyar for to-day. Them chaps may show up later," said Steve.

"Who d'ye s'pose the three ducks was that fired the cabin?"

"Oh, some dudes, maybe. One, the big feller, looks like a travelin' man."

"I thought we'd fixed his flint when he poked his head up through the scuttle there."

"Oh, that's an old game, puttin' his hat on a stick," growled Steve.

"It caught us, just the same," laughed Jim, who had been silent to that time.

"Yes, but we fooled them just as bad as they did us, by jumpin' out of the attic winder. I wonder if them chumps thought we was goin' to stay up in that loft to be smoked out, or burnt out?"

The rest of the conversation did not interest the detective enough to listen to it, and he arose from his reclining position.

Bettie and Montagu had also been listening, and when Thad rose, there was an exchange of questioning glances all around.

"Well," said Thad, at last, "there is little doubt about one thing—those people have succeeded in making fools of us pretty thoroughly. The only thing to be done now, is to get back to the city, and trust to luck in running down our game there. There is a satisfaction in knowing that we won't be bothered with these people for to-day, anyway."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to make sure that they wouldn't follow us?" asked Montagu.

"Yes, if such a thing were possible," replied Thad.

"It is possible, sir."

"How?"

"There is a large stone at one side of the door which we had to roll from in front of the door in order to get in. It is held in its present position by smaller stones which we can remove without being seen by the occupants of the cave. The moment these smaller stones are removed, the big rock will roll back to its old place in front of the door."

"Good," said Thad; "we'll do it."

"Won't it be cruel," said Bettie, "to fasten them in that place? They'll starve."

"There is no danger of that," rejoined Montagu. "They can get out through the tunnel as soon as the embers of the cabin cool off, which will only be a day or two at most."

"Very well, then," assented Bettie, "but I am awfully disappointed in our trip."

"Certainly not more so than I am," said Thad.

"I should have liked it so much if we could have had a skirmish with somebody," said Bettie, almost pouting.

"We can have that yet," said Montagu, laughing, "by going down and notifying Steve and his pals of our presence and desires."

"Which we had better not do," remarked Thad. "But let us fasten them in at once, and get back to the city."

Without further discussion they descended the side of the hill and soon found themselves beside the cave door, but screened from it by the huge boulder of which Montagu had spoken.

As he had said, it was found that the huge stone—some six feet in diameter—was ready to roll down from its perch, only being held in place by a few small stones.

With a pole for a lever our friends found no difficulty in tipping the stone enough to loosen the small stones so that they could remove them; which being done, the large boulder rolled down and settled firmly in its old bed in front of the cave door.

It appeared to take Steve and his companions a minute or two to realize what had happened, but when they did, they set up a savage howl.

Montagu could not resist the temptation of giving them a little sarcasm as a parting shot, so he said:

"I say, Humphrey, old boy, how do you like your situation?"

"Let us out," growled Steve, "or you'll be sorry for it."

"I don't think so," was Montagu's laughing reply. "We might be sorrier if we did let you out."

"Who are you, anyway?" asked Steve.

"We're the dudes you played the trick on. Now we're even. Good-by, Steve, old boy."

Humphrey and his companions rent the air with their curses, while our friends took their departure.

A few minutes' brisk walk brought them to where they had left their horses, and they were soon mounted and riding back to Cairo, where they took the train for the city.

It was almost dark when they arrived in the city, and being tired and hungry went to a restaurant and ordered dinner.

Thad was more completely out of spirits than he had been for years.

After working on this mysterious case for nearly two weeks, and arriving, as he supposed, almost at a solution, to have the whole thing slip through his fingers, was discouraging.

To-night was the time set for all the parties concerned to meet at Thad's "studio" and make their statements and disclosures, which were to forever clear up the mystery hanging over the case; to prove once for all whether Morton Ainsworth was the prince of villains or the victim of a gigantic and heartless conspiracy.

True, the conspirators could make their statements, but Thad's idea was to have Ainsworth, and, if possible, Thurlow also, present, and hear their side of the story.

Little conversation went on during dinner, all parties being too busy with their own thoughts to talk.

It was about seven o'clock when they arose from the table, and, as Thad expected his guests about eight, he started at once for his apartments, accompanied by Montagu and Bettie.

When they came in view of the building in which the apartments were situated, they could see through the gathering gloom that somebody was standing in front of the door, apparently waiting for somebody.

As soon as they came near enough they all recognized the person as Hugh Cockerall, Bettie's betrothed.

Of course he recognized neither one of the three, but Thad made himself known, and then introduced Bettie and Montagu by fictitious names.

As soon as the introduction was over and the whole party had gone up-stairs into Thad's apartments, Cockerall requested a private interview with the detective; so Thad took him into the back room, leaving Bettie and Montagu in the front.

When they were alone, Cockerall said:

"Your expedition was not a success, was it?"

"I am sorry to say that it was not," replied the detective.

"I knew it; but that makes no difference," said the young man. "I know where the parties are."

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed Thad in a delighted voice.

"Yes; I discovered it through the merest accident. My sister received a book of poems from what she claimed to be an unknown source, and thinking that I would discover nothing, left it lying carelessly upon a table. These women, Mr. Burr, are peculiar for two things: their own cunning and the idea that all men can be duped. Well, I presume they are right about the latter."

"Yes, yes," said Thad, impatiently; "but what was it about the book?"

"Oh, yes, I was going to tell you. But first let me finish what I was about to say. As I was saying, women are peculiar for their cunning and the idea that all men can be duped. They are generally right in this; but sometimes they make a mistake."

Thad groaned; but he saw that the young man was bound to finish what he had to say, so he resigned himself to the inevitable and prepared to listen.

"You remember you told me yesterday," resumed Cockerall, "to keep an eye upon Bettie?"

"Yes. Well, did you?" asked Thad, scarcely able to suppress his laughter.

"Not exactly. I thought I knew where she was. I called upon her as soon as I left you, and learned what her programme was for the next twenty-four hours; but, I tell you, Mr. Burr, you can't put any dependence on a woman."

"Didn't she carry out the programme?"

"No. An hour after I left her I decided to call again, and nobody knew, or knows yet, anything of her whereabouts. I have an idea, though."

"Where?"

"My opinion is she is off with that fellow, Montagu, looking for Ainsworth. If my theory proves correct, we are done, she and I."

"Nonsense, my boy," cried Thad, laughing.

"I mean it," exclaimed Cockerall, emphatically.

"Very well; now let us hear about the book."

"Well, as I said, my sister laid the book on a table, not dreaming that I or any one else would look at it; but there is where she made the mistake. I always look at new books with pretty covers on, and that is the style of a book this one was. I glanced through the affair, saw nothing in it to interest me, and was about to throw it down, when it occurred to me to look at the fly-leaves and see if any name was there."

"Was there?" asked Thad, wearily.

"No; but there was something more important."

"What was it?"

"A column of figures."

"Well, what did that amount to?"

"That was the very question I asked myself at first; but after studying the figures a little while I discovered what they amounted to."

"Well?"

"The figures were in a double column, joined with a hyphen, thus: 85-16, and so on. After looking at them for awhile, and racking my brain, it occurred to me that those figures referred to something inside the book. The first figure in nearly every instance being the largest, I came to the conclusion that it referred to the page, and that the smaller figure referred to the line. So I turned over to page 85, and ran down the page to line 16, and found simply the letter 'I'. That began the line. I was a little disappointed; but after a little reflection I concluded to jot down the letter, and go at the next one."

"The next figures were 110-6, and on looking it up I found the word 'will'. I jotted that down, and went for the next. Here I had 28-190, and as there were not that many lines on the page I was puzzled for a moment, until it occurred to me that probably the writer had transposed the figures in this instance to complicate matters. So I tried it the other way, and found that the twenty-eighth line on page 190 began with the word 'leave.'"

"Thus you continued, picking out word by word, until you found what?" demanded Thad, impatiently.

"You are impatient," said Cockerall with a hurt expression.

"Yes; let us get to the point. I have work before me to-night."

"Well, when I got it all put together, I found this," said the young man, laying a slip of paper on the table.

The detective picked it up eagerly and read the following:

"I will leave this country in two days, for Europe. Until then must remain in concealment. It is my fondest wish that you should accompany me. If your heart is still mine meet me to-night at Eden's Bower."

"See?" said Cockerall.

"Yes, I see," replied Thad. "And yet there is nothing to indicate either that the matter refers to our man, or what is meant by 'Eden's Bower.'"

"Not on the face of it, that's a fact. But I happen to know Ainsworth's figures well enough to know that those were his, and then I kept a close watch upon my sister. Late this afternoon she went over to the Parkinsons', and I shadowed her. An hour later my sister and Louise Parkinson took the train for New York City, and I was on their track, and I followed them to—"

"Where?"

"Doctor Barker's, otherwise Thurlow's house on Forty-second street. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to suppose that they are there now."

"Yes. And do you think that your sister was aware all along that Ainsworth was not dead?"

"There is not the shadow of a doubt of it, and what is more astonishing, I am now led to believe that they were secretly married before the public ceremony that was begun and never finished in the church."

"And do you think that it was intentional on his part that the ceremony should never be finished?"

"Undoubtedly."

"What was his motive?"

"He did not dare to be married in public—because he already has a wife living!"

"Did your sister know anything of this?"

"Certainly not."

"What excuse did he give her for desiring to be considered dead and buried?"

"That you will hear from her own lips, if I can induce her to speak."

"She must be got here to-night," said Thad. "I will manage that. I will have the whole crowd of them here."

"All right," said Cockerall, "and I will see to it that the other wife is here."

"What?"

"Yes, sir. She promised to come!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A NOTABLE GATHERING.

HUGH COCKERALL took his leave soon after the above conversation, promising to be back in an hour with Ainsworth's wife, whom he averred the detective knew, but would not enlighten him any further.

Bettie was delighted with the clever manner in which she had fooled her betrothed, and laughed heartily when Thad told her what he had said about being done with her.

"The foolish fellow!" she said. "It will take but five minutes to explain everything to him. He's a big-hearted, foolish fellow, that is all; but you must stick by me, Mr. Burr."

"I rather think I will," said Thad, warmly. "I do not see why I shouldn't when you have done nothing except for good. But we must get to work. Montagu," he said, turning to that young man, "can you find Sibyl Verne, do you think?"

"Certainly. She will be here in a few minutes."

"Good. I have a scheme for bringing Ainsworth and Thurlow here."

"Do you know where they are?" asked Montagu, in surprise.

"Oh, yes; the only trouble is to get them here in such a way that they won't know where they are going. Now this woman, Sibyl Verne, has a wonderful power of mesmerizing or hypnotizing; and I want to get her to go with me and hypnotize those men so that they will come here without resistance. Do you think she will do it?"

"Yes, and gladly, if she can only get even with that man Ainsworth."

They were scarcely done speaking when there was a rap at the door, which on being opened revealed the presence of Sibyl Verne.

She was got up in a different costume from what Thad had ever seen her in before. Instead of the mendicant dress and make-up he had seen on her before, she was attired neatly, and her face was natural; and the detective was astonished at and almost dazzled by her beauty.

As for Bettie, when told that that was her mother, she could hardly restrain herself from flying at her and taking her in her arms.

Montagu laid Thad's scheme before Sibyl, and she was willing and anxious to embrace it.

"How shall we manage to get in their presence, though?" she asked.

"That will be very easy," said Thad. "I will disguise myself as an old woman, and by putting a veil over your face you can easily pass for my daughter. I have it on good authority that Ainsworth intends to sail for Europe in a day or two, and Miss Cockerall, otherwise Mrs. Ainsworth, is going with him. She has advertised for a maid, and I want to get an engagement for my daughter. Before he discovers the fraud you can have him under your spell, I imagine."

"That will do," said Sibyl, smiling. "But how about the doctor? It is important that he should be here at once."

"He will, undoubtedly, be close to his friend, as I understand he cannot be induced to leave him for an instant; and you can hypnotize him at the same time."

"Very well; let us get ready."

The detective withdrew into his dressing-room, and half an hour later came forth as motherly-looking old lady as you would wish to see.

Leaving Bettie and Montagu to take care of the studio, Thad and Sibyl made their way as quickly as possible to the house in West Forty-second street.

Fortunately they had no trouble in obtaining an interview with Thurlow, and he swallowed the story about Ainsworth's wife advertising for a maid, and allowed the "old lady" to see his friend.

On being seen, Ainsworth admitted that he and his wife were to sail for Europe on the following day, but knew nothing about her advertising for a maid. She and his niece, Miss Parkinson, were out making some purchases, and the "old lady" would have to call in the morning.

However, before Thad, in the disguise of the old lady, had finished speaking to Ainsworth, he and Thurlow were both so completely under Sibyl's hypnotic spell that they could not have told their names.

Under this influence, it was no trouble to induce them to do anything that they were requested to do, and Thad had Ainsworth write the following note:

"DEAR FLORENCE:—

"I have gone with a couple of friends, and will be at No. — Thirteenth street for some time. I would esteem it a favor if you and Louise would come there as soon as you return. A matter which deeply concerns our welfare is to be attended to at that place this evening.

"Get there as soon as possible, as much depends upon it.

Your own,

"MORTON."

This note, directed to Miss Cockerall, was left with the servant, with instructions that it should be delivered to the young lady the moment she returned.

Thad and Sibyl then took their willing prisoners, put them into a hack, and had them driven to Thad's apartments.

The detective had, for the first time since he had been working upon the case, an opportunity to see and study this man Ainsworth, whom he had been inclined much of the time to believe was the victim of a cruel conspiracy.

His physical appearance certainly indicated a man who had suffered much, but whether from the persecutions of others or his own vices, even Thad, student of human nature that he was, was unable to decide.

His face, though slightly seamed, was still youthful and remarkably handsome; but there was an expression of mingled melancholy and gentleness, with a touch of something which the innocent might have taken for extreme piety, and the worldly-wise, perhaps, for hypocrisy.

He wore a full, clerical beard, tawny in hue and unmixed with a single strand of gray, while his hair was perfectly white.

When they arrived at the detective's studio Cockerall had returned and brought with him a woman, who, by the way was so heavily veiled that no one could see her features.

The lawyer with the claim against Ainsworth was also there, and of course did not recognize Thad, even after he had resumed his male attire and own personality. Thad soon set him right, however.

It was deemed best to keep Ainsworth and Thurlow under the influence of the hypnotic spell until everything was ready for the various statements that were to be made, so that they could make no trouble.

Thad had got the parties all arranged in the front room, and having no other light but the drop-lamp on the table, which had a shade on it, only the vaguest outline of the various faces could be discerned; but he had prepared an electric light which he intended to flash upon the assemblage at the proper time.

It was his purpose to have Sibyl Verne's statement first, but she had prepared a little surprise for the company, and just as the detective announced that everything was ready, Moses Erinstein strode into the room.

"This man, ladies and gentlemen," said Sibyl, rising, "has something to say, which will throw light upon a subject that has long been veiled in mystery, and I have at last, after many years, induced him to speak the truth."

With that she turned and, making a pass with her hands toward Ainsworth and Thurlow, removed the spell.

The two men rubbed their eyes and looked about them, utterly bewildered.

At that moment Montagu, who had taken it upon himself to attend the door, conducted the Misses Cockerall and Parkinson into the room.

The next moment Thad turned on his electric lamp and flooded the room with light.

Sibyl was still standing facing the crowd when the light was turned on, and Ainsworth and Thurlow naturally turned their eyes toward her.

The different effects that the sight of this woman had upon these two men were something remarkable.

Thurlow, who believed his wife to be thoroughly bad, assumed an expression of extreme mortification and shame, while Ainsworth turned deadly pale and became the picture of terror.

Thad was a close observer of the effect the woman's appearance had upon the two men, but this observation of them did not cause him to miss another sight equally as interesting.

While all eyes were turned upon the beautiful Sibyl, the woman whom Cockerall had brought and represented as Ainsworth's wife, rose slowly from her seat, and when she had gained her feet, suddenly threw back her veil.

Thad was the first to get a glimpse of her face, and he was both surprised and horrified. Surprised to see who it was—for it was the woman Liz, who had tried to cut his throat in the tenement-house; and horrified at the bloodthirsty glare she had turned upon Sibyl. The black eyes seemed fairly to shoot forth fire, and the naturally hard, malicious face had metamorphosed into that of a fiend.

Scarcely a second elapsed before Sibyl caught sight of the woman's face, and she quailed before it like a kid before a tigress.

For a full minute the woman stood silently glaring at her in this manner, apparently holding her by a charm as a serpent does a bird; and then she began to speak, or hiss, in slow, measured tones.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she began. "After all these years, we meet at last. Under the name of Sibyl Verne you thought I wouldn't know you, Myra Thurlow, the woman that lured my husband there, Morton Ainsworth, away from me!"

The woman paused, choked with the vehemence of her passion.

Sibyl stood like a penitent thief, her eyes bent on the floor.

"Seventeen years ago to-night," she finally resumed—"you don't remember the anniversary, do you, you vile wretch?—seventeen years ago to-night, your fatal beauty and cunning wiles caused my husband to leave me for you; to leave me in want and beggary for you, shameless woman! To you and to him I owe a life of misery, of crime, of shame! To you, devil that you are," she fairly hissed, "I owe it to have to associate with the vermin of the slums!"

Again she was compelled to pause, overcome with her emotion.

Thad saw that nothing was to come out of the woman's harangue—she had already said all that she could say, which was evidently true, for if Sibyl's face had not been a confirmation of it, Ainsworth's certainly was; while Thurlow sat sorrowfully nodding affirmatively. So the detective decided to put an end to it at once.

Stepping in front of the woman just as she was about to resume her onslaught, he said:

"Now, my good woman, I will have to ask you to desist. You have said all that is necessary."

"Have I?" she screamed. "Am I to suffer for seventeen years, and then have no chance to speak?"

"You will have a chance to speak in court, madam," the detective pleaded in his kindly voice. "Is that man your husband?" he asked, pointing to Ainsworth.

"Ask him whether he is or not," she hissed. "And there is another one of his tempters," she went on, pointing at Miss Cockerall; but that young lady was unconscious of the accusation, for she had fainted some minutes before."

This seemed to make the woman more furious than ever, and she appeared to be unable to speak, so tempestuous had become her passion, and when Thad attempted to quiet her she fought like a wild animal.

He tried to restrain her with gentleness at first, but finding that unavailing after a long tussle with her, he finally grasped her wrists and called upon Montagu to hand him a pair of handcuffs to put on her.

This infuriated her.

With a movement so sudden and dextrous that the detective was taken unawares, she wrenched herself loose from him, and the next instant a knife flashed in her hand.

Strange to say, she did not attack the detective, however, but made a spring for Sibyl, and before she could be restrained, had buried the blade in the poor crouching woman's breast.

Sibyl sunk to the floor, and her furious murdereress snatched away the dripping knife, and made a dash at Miss Cockerall. But fortunately by that time some of the others had regained enough of their presence of mind to assist Thad, and the woman was finally overpowered and handcuffed.

In the mean time Sibyl had been carried and laid upon a lounge and Thurlow examined her wound.

It was found to be fatal, although he thought she might live for some hours. The wound was dressed and everything that could be was done for her comfort.

Although there could be but little filial affection, Bettie could not but realize that the beautiful though erring woman was her mother, and knelt beside her and took the dying woman's hand in her own.

For a long time Sibyl remained unconscious, and even when she emerged from that she remained for some time in a semi-comatose state. But after a while she opened her eyes and looked long and earnestly at Bettie.

Finally she said:

"Who are you? You are not my little Bettie, are you?"

"Yes, mother," replied Bettie.

The name "mother" seemed to thrill the poor woman so much that she was compelled to pause. At length, however, she continued:

"Bettie, my darling, your mother, who has never been a mother to you, is soon to leave you forever. But before she goes I want you to know something of what your mother has suffered and how innocently. How she has suffered martyrdom to save another who was also innocent, but believed guilty until recently, and who, in turn, believes me to be a guilty woman to this moment."

"Therefore, my child, listen to the confession of the man Moses Erinstein, and when he has finished, read this," she said, drawing a paper from her bosom and handing it to Bettie. "This I ask of you, my child, not for my sake, but for your own and your father's, that when I am gone you may be able to mention my name without a blush. Also that the man who has caused all our sorrow and disgrace may be brought to justice."

"Ask your father to forgive me for believing him guilty, as I forgive him for believing me so, even while he continues to believe it."

"But I must stop. I am growing weaker, and I want to live to see your father for just one moment after he knows that I am innocent."

She ceased to speak, and after pressing Bettie's lips to her own for a moment, beckoned to Moses to approach.

When he was near enough to the couch to hear her now almost inarticulate voice, she asked him to commence his confession.

The Jew commenced the recital, and at the same instant Ainsworth attempted to slip out of the room and make his escape; but Thad had his eye on him, and very quietly but firmly led him back and seated him, with the promise that a second attempt of the kind would compel him (Thad) to put him in irons.

Ainsworth assumed a martyred expression and sat down.

Moses then began the confession, which for obvious reasons must be told in the third person, as the fellow's real character could not be shown if described by himself.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MOSES'S STORY.

ON the evening of September 19th, just seventeen years previous to the time on which the events just recorded occurred in Thad Buri's office, Amos Thurlow sat in his office in the town of Cleveland, Ohio.

Thurlow was a prosperous and popular young physician, enjoying a large and lucrative practice. He had accumulated some property, had a beautiful home, and was married to the handsomest woman in the town. He had been married about two years, and had a sweet little baby a year old.

Dr. Thurlow had not sat in his office long when his wife, Myra, entered with the baby, as was her custom, to ask him to come home to supper.

Thurlow was passionately fond of his wife and child, so after a romp about the office with them, he put the baby on his shoulder and started to leave the office.

At the door he was met by a messenger, calling him to visit a patient, so that he was compelled to send the wife and child home alone and forego the pleasure of accompanying them.

As is sometimes the custom in country places, where everybody knows everybody else, the doctor did not lock his office door; and five minutes after leaving the office two men entered.

One was a tall, well-dressed, handsome man,

with blue eyes, tawny beard and a perpetual smile, which was fascinating to the ladies, seductive to unwary strangers and suggestive of villainy to the expert student of human nature.

The other was a short, thickset, dark-complexioned man, with a full black beard and a decided Hebrew cast of countenance.

The first was Morton Ainsworth, the other Moses Ernstein.

"The doctor appears to be absent," said Ainsworth, looking about the office.

"Yaas, he abbeears to disabbear," said Moses.

"Veil, v'at you vas do now, mine friendt?"

"I do not know, Moses. Look here, can not you keep yourself shady until to-morrow? I will give you the money then. It is impossible for me to get it to-night."

"Do-morrow vill see me behint der bars mit Steve offer I don't vas git der monish und skip do-night, mine friendt."

As may be inferred from the above dialogue, at least one of the men had been guilty of some villainy for which he feared arrest.

The facts were these:

Some two weeks previously a widow had been murdered for her money. She was the widow of a prominent lawyer who had died a short time before, leaving his wife as dowry an insurance policy for a hundred thousand dollars. This money she had received in bank-notes the very day of the murder, and having no opportunity to deposit the money in the bank, still had it about the house.

The fact was only known to two or three people, among them her brother-in-law, Morton Ainsworth. The latter had been wealthy, but doubtful speculations—some said gambling—had placed him in straitened circumstances. So here, he thought, was an opportunity to redeem his fortunes.

Going to two worthless characters in the town, Stephen Humphrey and Moses Ernstein, he had entered into an agreement with them whereby they were to murder the woman for one-third each of the spoils.

They carried out their part of the agreement so far as the murder was concerned, but for some reason could discover nothing of the money.

The crime was traced to the two rascals, and Steve had been arrested; but Moses, up to the time in question, had succeeded in eluding the bounds of justice, and having no money, had come to the man for whom he had done the dirty work, for money with which to make his escape.

Whether Ainsworth had the money or not, he pretended that he had not, and had promised to get it of his friend Thurlow, who usually had plenty of cash about him. This was what had brought the two men to the doctor's office.

Just as they had reached the stage of conversation recorded above, they were interrupted by a knock at the door, which being opened, an old gentleman entered.

"Is this the office of Doctor Thurlow?" inquired the visitor.

"Yaas," replied Moses, "offer he don't vas got some mortgages on it."

"I hope he is more fortunate than to have a mortgage on his property," said the stranger, smiling. "But will you be good enough to tell me where I can find Doctor Thurlow?"

"Out of town," said Ainsworth, winking at Moses.

"Yaas, outd of down," reiterated the other rascal.

"Have you any idea when he will return?" asked the stranger.

"Let me see—when did he say he would return, Moses?" said Ainsworth, reflectively.

"In a gouple of years," said Moses.

"Indeed?" cried the stranger, in surprise. "Is he in the habit of going off on these protracted trips?"

"Oh, yaas," said Moses, with a serious countenance, "he goes away effery week or dwo und stays a gouple of years."

"You are facetious," said the stranger, smiling.

"Will you please direct me to his house?"

"With great pleasure," interposed Ainsworth, with a sweet smile. "Is anybody ill, my dear sir?"

"Oh, no. The doctor is—"

"Friend of yours?" interrupted Moses.

"Yes, rather. He is my son."

"Old Thurlow, by all that's devilish!" whispered Ainsworth to Moses. "I thought I recognized that face. He must never leave this office, Moses, and you shall have half the spoils, you know." And then to the stranger: "I was just asking my friend here if he did not think it possible that either your son or his wife might return to-night, but he thinks it hardly likely. I think myself, however, that he will be back in a day or two."

"Very well. I will go to a hotel in the mean time. I am much obliged to you, gentlemen, for your kindness."

"Don't mention it, my dear sir," said Ainsworth. "Allow me to ask you, Mr. Thurlow, have you not been absent from here some time?"

"Yes, sir; I have not seen my son for sixteen years."

"Sixteen years? Mein gracious!" exclaimed Moses. "Did you get lost, mein friendt?"

"If you care to hear it, gentlemen, I will tell you my story," said the stranger, "which will explain my long absence and my present return."

While this was being said Ainsworth took a bottle of cologne from his pocket and, after saturating his handkerchief with the perfume, gave it to Moses in such a way as not to be noticed by the stranger. Moses, in turn, took a small box of powder from his pocket and sprinkled a little of the powder upon the handkerchief.

"By all means," said Ainsworth, blandly. "While your story can in nowise affect me personally, I am always glad to hear the recital of others' sorrows that I may comfort them, if possible."

"You are very kind," said the stranger. "I guessed by your kindly face that you had a warm heart, ever open to those in trouble; perhaps too much so for your own good. Am I not right?"

"You hit der head on der nail," said Moses.

"I fear you are right, said Ainsworth, modestly, although it is rank egotism in me to ever admit such a thing."

"Nothing of the kind," rejoined the stranger.

"What the face proclaims the heart should not hesitate to avow. But to my story: Sixteen and a half years ago I had the misfortune to lose my wife, and was so despondent over my loss that I determined to leave the country and try to dissipate my sorrow by travel. Selling my property, I placed a greater part of the proceeds, together with my only child, a boy of nine—the present Dr. Thurlow—in the hands of my dearest friend, Charles Ainsworth. Did you know the Ainsworths, sir?"

"Slightly," replied Ainsworth.

"Most estimable people, sir."

"Oh, dey vas daises," said Moses.

"As I said," resumed the stranger, "I placed my property in my friend's hands in trust for my son, and made my friend his guardian. I then bade farewell to my home and all that had once been dear to me, and since that time have been an almost constant wanderer on the face of the earth."

"Your fate has indeed been a sad one," said Ainsworth, wiping his eyes. "Excuse these tears. Your narrative affects me deeply."

"God bless you!" cried the stranger. "Your kindness overwhelms me."

"Pray, go on," said Ainsworth.

"I heard from home but seldom," continued the stranger, "and it was only recently, therefore, that I learned of the death of my friend; and of the fact that the property—mine and his own—having fallen into the hands of his son, had been frittered away in foolish speculation, or worse, leaving my son next to penniless."

"Merciless scamp," said Ainsworth, winking to Moses.

"Dot feller vas no good, I baet you," said Moses.

"This is my story, gentlemen. I only wish to add that if this son of my friend's, Morton Ainsworth, is to be found, I shall make it very uncomfortable for him."

"That I should," said Ainsworth. "But my dear sir, you look faint. Take a smell of this perfume. It will revive you."

And before the stranger could offer any resistance Ainsworth had pushed the handkerchief under his nose.

The next minute the stranger sunk upon the floor—lifeless.

The two villains then proceeded to go through the stranger's pockets, and found a large amount of money and some valuable jewelry.

Ainsworth gave the jewelry to the Jew, knowing that its identification would convict the possessor, and took possession of the money himself. His calculation was right, for the next day the Jew was arrested, and subsequently sent to the State's Prison, along with his old pal, Steve Humphrey.

When Ainsworth and Moses left the office they thought they had done their work so neatly that nobody would ever suspect them, but they were mistaken.

Five minutes after they were gone another person entered the office.

This was a young man named Montagu, who was studying medicine under Dr. Thurlow.

He had been sent to the office by the doctor's wife to see what was detaining the doctor, in case he should have returned to the office.

As the villains had extinguished the light on leaving the office, the young man was horrified at stumbling over the dead body.

Being a lad of uncommon courage, he did not run; but struck a light.

After examining the body and seeing no signs of violence, the boy concluded that the man had had heart disease and come to the office for treatment, and while there was seized with a fit of apoplexy and died.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Montagu was about to turn out the light preparatory to going out to give the alarm, when his attention was attracted by a small silver box, resembling a snuffbox, on the floor.

Picking it up and opening it he found it to contain a dingy white powder, and upon a little more careful examination, he discovered a name engraved upon the inside of the lid. The name read:

MORTON AINSWORTH.

The quick-witted boy, having long suspected that this man was not the upright individual that he represented himself as being, at once jumped at the conclusion that something was wrong. In other words, he formed a connecting link between Ainsworth, the powder and the dead man.

Putting the box into his pocket, and leaving the office, he started for Thurlow's house as fast as he could run.

The night was very dark, and it was raining, so that in dodging across a street he came very nearly being run over by a team attached to a carriage and being driven at a rapid speed.

The horses were almost upon him, and the boy did the only thing in his power to prevent being trodden under foot—he grasped the horses by the bits, and checked them.

As he did so the driver yelled at him to get out of the way!

Montagu glanced back at the carriage, and a street lamp throwing its light upon the faces of the occupants, he saw who they were.

It was Morton Ainsworth and the doctor's wife, Myra Thurlow!

Myra was Montagu's cousin, and the sight of her in the company of this man, whom he believed to be a murderer, drove the boy frantic, so he clung to the horses more determinedly than ever.

In vain did Ainsworth bawl at him to release the team; in vain did he try to force the horses over the lad; the latter still clung to the bits and prevented the team from starting again.

Finally, losing all patience, and realizing how precious was his time, Ainsworth sprung from the carriage, and with the butt end of his whip struck the boy a blow over the head that felled him insensible to the ground.

The carriage rolled away, leaving the lad lying in the street.

How long he lay there he knew not, but when he finally came to his senses, or at least sufficient of them to stand upon his feet, he staggered home, or attempted to; but really what happened to him next he could never tell. He was evidently deranged, for it all seemed to be a blank to him for months afterward.

He had a vague desire for revenge, and a vague recollection of traveling in search of his cousin. His first distinct recollection of anything was of being in San Francisco, wandering penniless about the streets, but how he got there he had no idea. He remembered of finally meeting Ainsworth, who took him home with him.

He remained at Ainsworth's house for a long time, and then, all of a sudden, he recovered his right mind, to discover that his cousin was not with Ainsworth, nor did the latter know where she was; he also learned that Ainsworth had got possession of all his property and that of his Cousin Myra and Dr. Thurlow.

His thirst of revenge was stronger now than ever, and added to it was the desire to obtain his rights; so he soon determined upon a plan of operation.

He had been an imbecile a long time, and he would have no trouble in acting that part again. Under his guise of simplicity he would still live with this man and watch his chances for revenge.

For years he had kept this up, and assisted by his cousin, he had used his utmost endeavors to get Ainsworth into the toils; but up to this time the fellow had been too much for them.

Even now he would have easily slipped through their fingers only for the assistance of a superior mind, that of Thaddeus Burr.

On two different occasions Montagu had known him to be guilty of murder, once through a hired assassin, and once by his own hands, and yet he had slipped his neck out of the noose.

Montagu's latest attempt was the hunting up of Ainsworth's first wife, the woman Liz, whom Ainsworth believed to be dead, because he had hired a man to kill her. This expose came on the very eve of his intended marriage with Florence Cockerall, and while he did not let her know that he had another wife living, he gave her various excuses for not wishing to marry her in public (he had already married her secretly), and finally he was driven to get up the ruse mentioned in the first chapter.

It was his intention, had he succeeded in the trick, to leave the country, and afterward, possibly, of letting his latest wife, or victim, into the secret, and induce her to follow him.

But, thanks to the sharp scent and indomitable patience of Detective Burr, his ingenious scheme was a failure.

Ainsworth's ingenuity in preparing all the minute details of a scheme was demonstrated in his putting the powder in the bouquet. This was done, of course, after the pretended death, and he knew too well that the bouquet would be hunted up and examined, and a sufficient cause of death discovered among its leaves.

In the details of all his frauds, except his murders, Montagu, Sibyl Verne and Moses had assisted him, and for no other reason than to trap the scoundrel in his own meshes!

But, they would never have succeeded except through the assistance of Thad.

This ended the confession and statement of Moses, and the written one of Sibyl, otherwise Myra, was read. It will be told in the same narrative style as that of Moses.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SIBYL'S STORY.

WHILE the events, recorded in the last chapter were taking place in Dr. Thurlow's office, his wife sat in the cozy little parlor waiting for her husband to return home, and singing a lullaby to the baby.

Finally a feeling of loneliness and dread came over her, and she ran to the foot of the stairs leading to the second floor, and called Montagu, who was in his room busy over his books.

When the young man came down, Myra insisted upon his going to the doctor's office and ascertaining what was delaying her husband.

As soon as the young man was out of the house, Myra felt better. Some how she felt that the young man would hasten her husband's return.

Buoyed up with this feeling, she fell to talking to the baby.

"Go to sleep, Bettie, go to sleep! Papa will soon be here. Ha! There he is now."

She had heard somebody walk across the porch, and believing it to be her husband, she tripped gayly to the door and opened it for him before he had time to touch the knob, an old trick of hers.

The next instant she uttered a little scream of surprise and alarm and retreated into the hall.

The intruder entered without invitation and stood facing her, hat in hand and smiling his blandest.

"Why, Mr. Ainsworth!" she exclaimed, in a subdued tone.

"You are surprised to see me, Mrs. Thurlow," he said, in a sweet voice.

"Why, yes—I expected my husband," she stammered, in a flutter of excitement.

"And so it might have been, Myra," he said, in a cold, calm tone, "if you had heeded the promptings of your own heart in times gone by."

"You flatter yourself, sir," she said, scornfully. "But I do not wish to speak upon the subject. It would be highly improper for me to do so in my present position, even if it were not utterly distasteful to me at all times."

"Now, now, my dear Mrs. Thurlow," he cried, with a sweet smile, "you must not lose your temper at a little pleasantry. I merely refer to the past—that delicious past—as one recalls a heavenly dream. But come, Mrs. Thurlow, let us sit down," he went on, strolling into the parlor and throwing himself languidly upon a sofa. "Sit down, please; I desire to speak to you upon a subject of vital importance to yourself."

"Please go on," she urged, nervously, and refusing to sit. "I cannot imagine, however, what you can say that is of vital importance to me."

"Myra—"

"You will please address me by my proper name, Mrs. Thurlow, sir."

"As you please, Mrs. Thurlow, five years ago I loved you devotedly—would have sacrificed my life for you—"

"Stop, sir!" she interrupted. "I demand that you cease to speak to me upon this subject! I will not listen to it! You have a wife and I have a husband—"

"Pardon me," he interrupted. "Did I understand you to say that you have a husband?"

"I spoke neither in riddle nor cipher, sir, and I trust that you are not deaf."

"I wish I had been deaf rather than to have heard those words. Pardon me for informing you that you have no husband!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Listen, and I will tell you. I had occasion to call at the office of Doctor Thurlow, this evening, when, what to my horror should I find upon the office floor, weltering in its blood, but a corpse!"

"My husband!" she shrieked.

"No."

"Thank God."

"No, it was not your husband, but it would have been a thousand times better for him and you if it had been. It was only one of your husband's victims."

"Great Heavens! has he been so unfortunate as to make a failure in an operation, and death has resulted from it?"

"No; it was the result of no operation—that is, no scientific operation. Your husband simply murdered him in cold blood for his money!"

"It is a lie! A base, malicious lie!"

"I earnestly wish," he returned, coolly, "that you could prove that assertion to the satisfaction of the officials who now have your husband in custody."

"Have they arrested him?" she cried, wringing her hands frantically.

"Yes."

"Oh, merciful Heaven! What shall I do?" she wailed piteously.

"I will tell you: I am the only witness of his crime, and I love you too tenderly to plunge you into the disgrace which his conviction would incur, to appear against him."

"You will not appear against him?"

"No."

"Oh, Mr. Ainsworth, that is a kindness I did not expect. I do not believe my husband guilty—I know he is not. It is some base conspiracy;

but it may be so cunningly concocted that his conviction might be secured! But you will not appear against him, and I am sure he can prove an alibi. Oh, how good of you, Mr. Ainsworth!"

"I will not appear against him—"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Ainsworth, and God bless you!"

"I will not appear against him, upon one condition."

"Name it. I am not rich, but I am willing to make any sacrifice to save my husband. I know you are said to be in need of money, and—"

"I want no money, Myra. The consideration which I ask would be as easily within your gift if you were the poorest mendicant."

"It is—"

"That you become my wife!"

Myra was too much overcome with agitation and suppressed rage to answer for the moment, but paced up and down the room livid and trembling.

Ainsworth was too much of a diplomatist to interrupt her, but sat coolly surveying her with a bland smile.

"Pardon me, my dear Myra," he said at last, "but I don't believe you answered my last question. Come, what do you say?"

"Coward!" she shrieked, stopping in front of him. "How dare you come here and insult a defenseless woman?"

"I meant no insult, Myra—"

"You did!"

"Listen."

"I will not!"

"You must! I would neither insult you nor allow another to do it, and live! But, such is man's selfishness, that, to secure his own happiness, he will sometimes cause those whom he cherishes temporary pain, especially when he knows that pain is but the harbinger of joy."

"Your husband, by his crime, has forfeited his claim to your esteem, and in the eyes of the law you stand divorced. In this dilemma I come to offer you my protection, and the love that has ever burned for you!"

"But what you propose is impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"I love him, and—"

"Hate me. But, my dear Myra, when you come to know my heart, you will love me as ardently as you hate me now."

"I cannot! I will not! It is madness to think of it! Although it would be against my will—Nay, the very thought is repugnant to me, and the sacrifice would be wholly and solely for his liberty; still he would know nothing of that, and the knowledge of my infidelity would be worse than death to him."

"But he shall know that you went against your wish—that you sacrificed yourself for him. You shall see me write a note to him to that effect, and I will deliver it to him."

"But you say that you love me—"

"Devotedly."

"Unselfishly?"

"Yes."

"If that is true, you will consider my honor, and refuse to appear against my husband without demanding as a reward my sacrifice of husband, home, honor and happiness!"

"Myra, you are asking too much of a mortal. To throw away the most precious jewel in the universe, and one that he has striven a lifetime to possess, would be the act of a god, not a man! Come," he continued, rising and approaching a writing-desk. "I will write the note. In one hour I start for San Francisco. If you are not ready to accompany me, I will file my affidavit of your husband's guilt. Just devote a portion of the time I am using in writing this note, my dear Myra, to considering which will give you greater sorrow, eloping with me or seeing your husband swinging by the neck."

Ainsworth sat down and coolly penned two notes, the first of which read as follows, and which he showed to Myra:

"DEAR THURLOW:—"

"As you are aware, I am the only real witness to your crime. Friendship for you and love for Myra, however, forbid me to testify against you. I cannot do this for nothing, though, old fellow, and as I always loved Myra devotedly, I have concluded to take her as my reward. Allow me to state in this connection that it is through no design on her part that she goes; in fact, she loves you too well and hates me too ardently to go across the street with me if it were not to save you from the gallows. We leave you the baby, old fellow."

"Yours, etc.,"

"MORTON AINSWORTH."

The other note, which was the one left for Thurlow, read thus:

"DEAR THURLOW:—"

"I do not know whether this will be news to you or not; but I had the mortification of seeing your wife running away with a young man whom I did not recognize."

"Your true friend,"

"MORTON AINSWORTH."

As soon as she had read the letter she fell upon her knees beside the cradle in which her baby lay, and began to weep over it as though her heart would break.

"I cannot, I cannot," she cried, piteously, "go and leave my baby!"

"To save him?"

"But—but the baby—"

"Have you no regard for him, that you do not wish to leave him something to comfort him when you are gone?"

"You are right, I presume," she faltered and sobbed. "But, oh! this is terrible! God forgive me if I be doing wrong!"

"Come!" he said, taking her arm and almost dragging her from the room. "Time is almost up. Ten minutes more and I either take the train with you or alone, and if I take it alone, you know what the consequences will be."

A few minutes later they were driving to the depot at a breakneck gait, when they met young Montagu, as already related.

Twenty minutes later, Amos Thurlow returned home. Not seeing his wife, he concluded she had gone out to a neighbor's, until he saw the note on the table, which seemed to explain all. She had gone off with a young man! Who could it be? After racking his brain for a long time, he finally concluded it must be Montagu, her cousin.

Thurlow was about crazed over the loss of his wife, and while he was still in the first throes of his grief, two constables entered and arrested him for murder!

The following day Ainsworth returned to Cleveland, having left Myra some place near by. This returning was a blind to make it appear that he was innocent, if, indeed, any one had suspected him.

He called upon Thurlow at the jail, attended to several business matters for him, among which was taking charge of his property—and keeping it, as it subsequently turned out—and formally adopting Thurlow's baby. Thus making him the life-long slave and dupe that we have seen him to be.

Montagu's statement corroborated that of Myra and Moses; and when Florence Cockerall was asked to make a statement, she simply said that she had heard that Mr. Ainsworth had another wife, and when she spoke to him about it he admitted that there was a wicked woman who he believed was making a claim of that kind, but that it was a blackmailing scheme.

Ainsworth would say nothing for a while, but sat there with a bland smile on his face, and finally, when urged by Thad, replied:

"What is the use of making any detailed statement here? I simply deny the whole batch of charges as the utterances of a lot of wicked conspirators against an honest man. If the matter comes into court, I shall meet their charges formally."

When all were alone, Thurlow arose and walked unsteadily across the room to where his wife lay, in Bettie's arms, and sunk down beside her.

The next instant he arose trembling and ghastly, and uttered the one word:

"Dead!"

Then looking wildly about the room till his eyes met Thad's, he asked in a stage whisper:

"Can it all be true?"

"How can you doubt it after what you have heard?" Thad asked, solemnly.

Without another word he strode over to where Ainsworth sat, and shaking his finger in his face, said:

"Deny it, deny it like a man! Look me in the eye and tell me that there is no truth in anything I have heard to-night!"

But, Ainsworth's courage seemed to have failed him. He only looked at the floor and shook his head mournfully.

"Then I must believe it all!" he cried in a husky voice. "Curses! a million curses on you, Morton Ainsworth! It is not that you murdered and robbed my father; it is not that you robbed me of my wife, home and child; it is not that you have murdered an innocent woman after blackening her fair name for seventeen years; it is not that you gave me a felon's name, under which I have had to skulk and cringe from my fellow-man for seventeen years. I could have forgiven you all these; but because you have broken my idol! For seventeen years I have worshiped, adored you, as the Buddhist does his joss, as the most perfect of men, and the greatest of martyrs. And now you have smashed, demolished my idol! And you, fiend!—Lucifer that you are—I am going to kill you! and send your black soul shrieking into hell!"

And he would probably have carried out his threat if Thad hadn't restrained him just as he was grappling the scoundrel's throat.

The lawyer from California stepped up at this point, and asked to have some of his warrants against Ainsworth served, and as there were so many charges against the fellow, Thad didn't see that it made much difference which one he was locked up on, so he turned in a police call, and when a couple of officers arrived, Thad handed over Ainsworth and the woman Liz, who had murdered Myra, to their keeping.

When Thad had got through with his official business, he looked about for some of the good friends whom he had made during the working up of the case, especially Bettie and Hugh Cockerall, and was surprised to find them kneeling on each side of Thurlow beside the dead woman.

THE END.

THE GREAT SCOUT'S REMARKABLE SEARCH!

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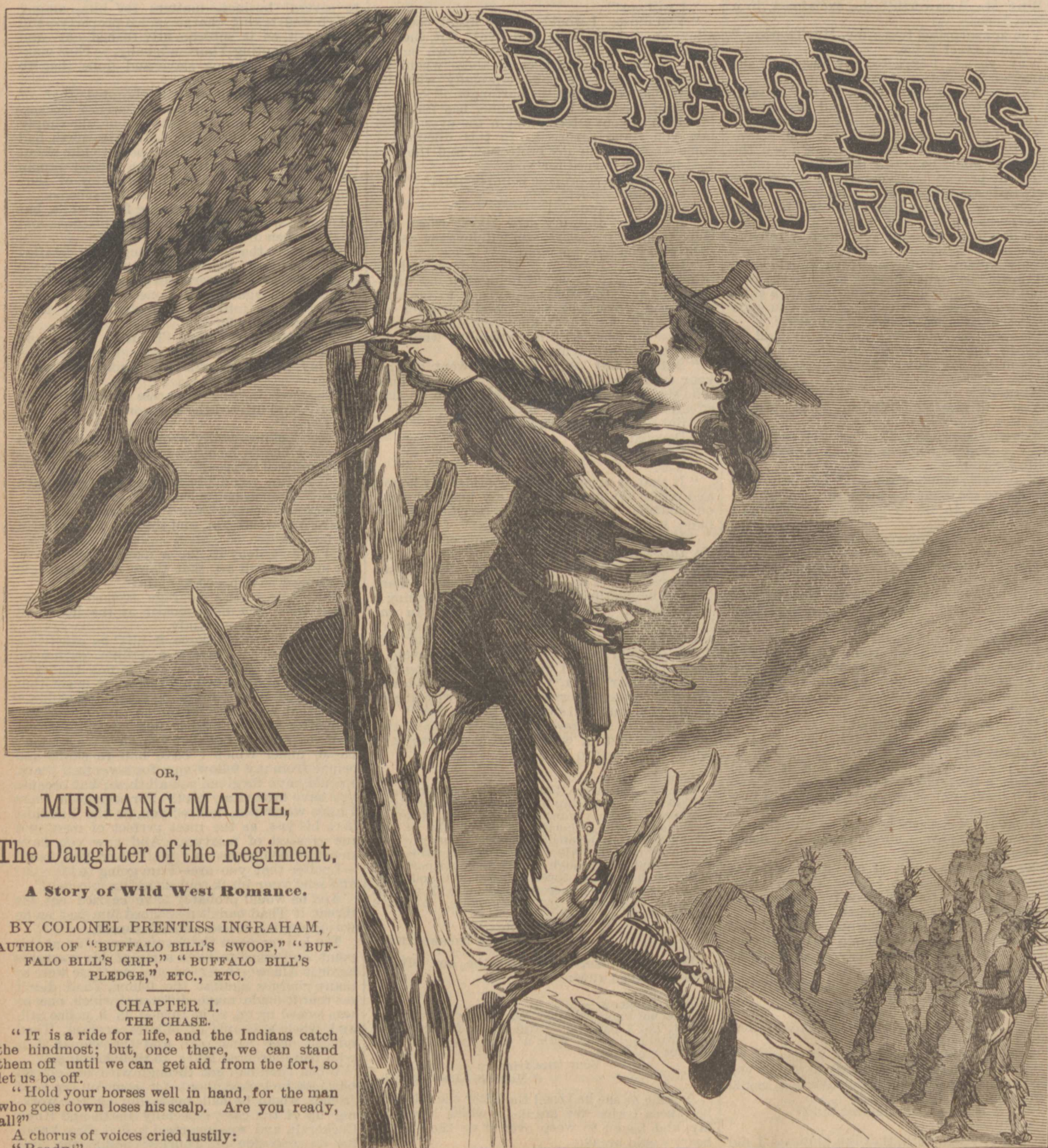
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OR,
MUSTANG MADGE,
The Daughter of the Regiment.

A Story of Wild West Romance.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S SWOOP," "BUFFALO BILL'S GRIP," "BUFFALO BILL'S PLEDGE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE CHASE.

"It is a ride for life, and the Indians catch the hindmost; but, once there, we can stand them off until we can get aid from the fort, so let us be off."

"Hold your horses well in hand, for the man who goes down loses his scalp. Are you ready, all?"

A chorus of voices cried lustily:

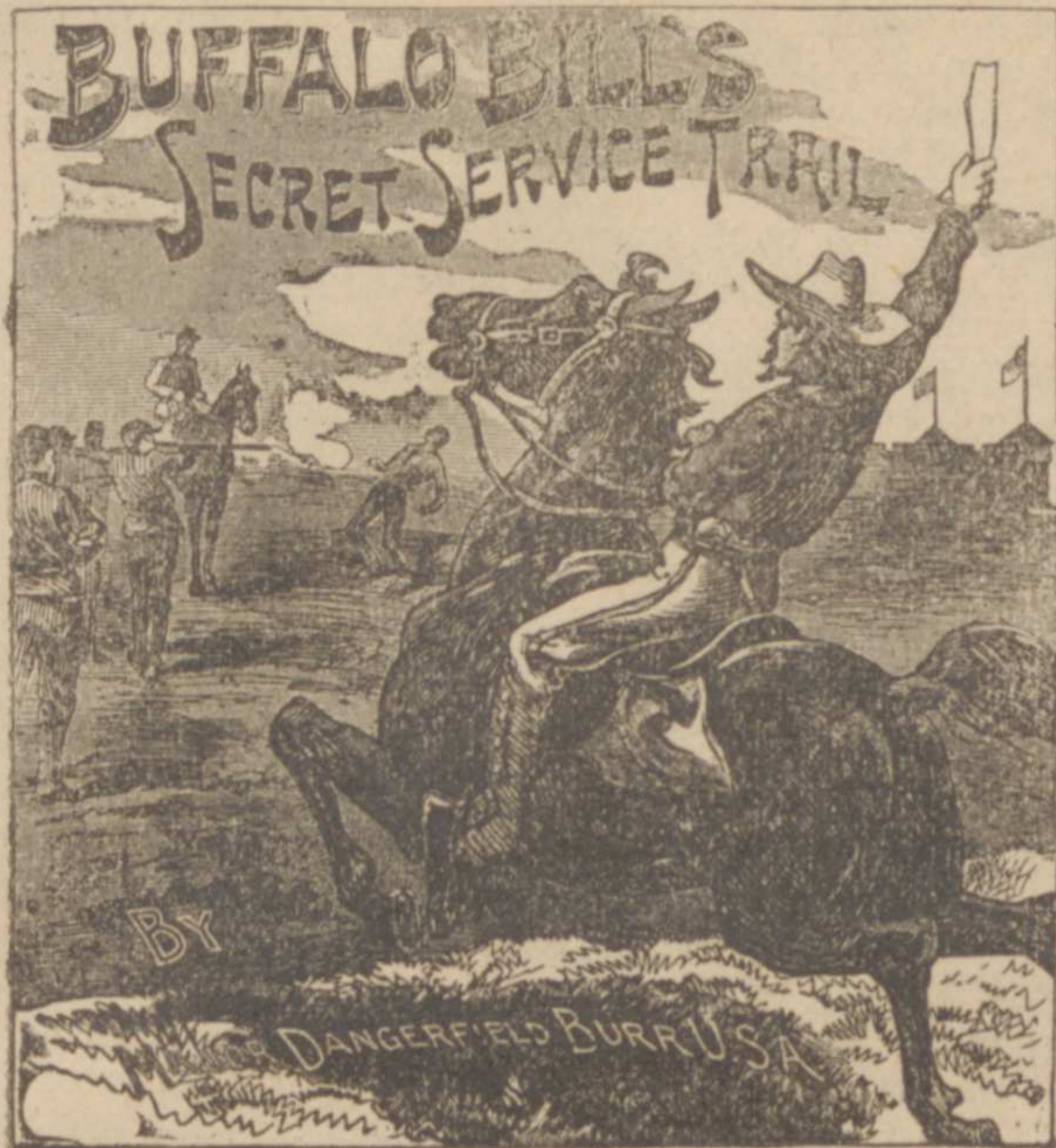
"Ready!"

"Then follow me."

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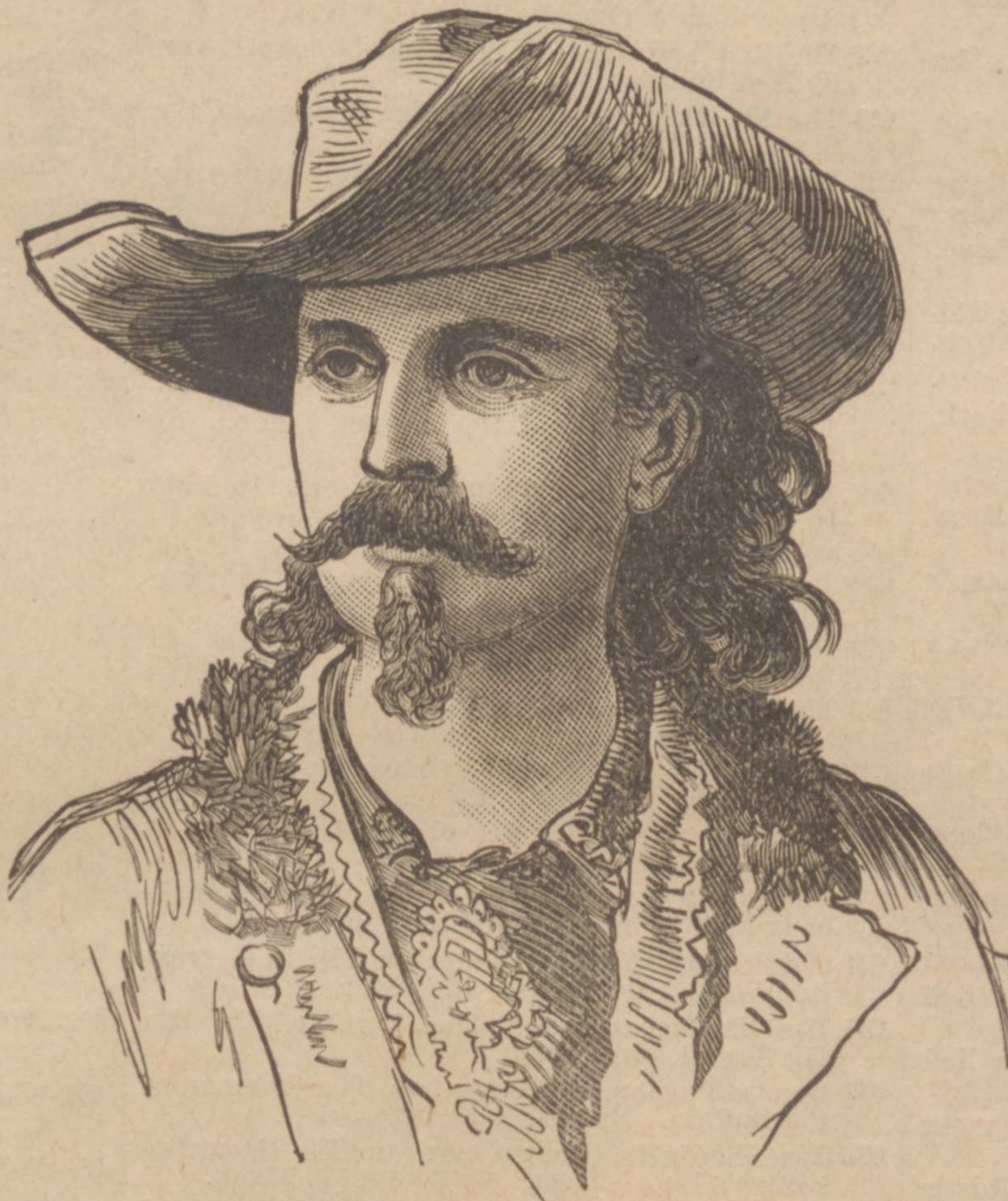
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